

Community Responses to the Coronavirus Pandemic: How mutual aid can help Case Study Report

Eleanor Benton and Anne Power

Contents

Introduction.....	2
1. Furloughed Foodies	3
2. Dons Local Action Group	5
3. Chorley Buddies.....	7
4. Prince Rupert Hotel Shrewsbury.....	9
5. Local food collection for foodbanks	11
6. South Milford Isolation Group.....	12
7. Kensal Green Mutual Aid Group	14
8. Sway Village Volunteers	17
9. Scrub Hub Durham	19
10. Brockenhurst Parish Church Covid-19 Support Group	21
11. My Music Northamptonshire	23
12. Mosely Together	25
13. Grange Association Helpers.....	27
14. Guru Maneyo Granth Gurdwara	28
15. Wixams & Wilstead Community Shopping Club.....	31
16. CRHG Mutual Aid Group.....	33
17. Harlesden Mutual Aid.....	35
18. High Town Mutual Aid.....	37
19. Ponteland Community Group	38
20. Caring for Carers.....	40
21. Curo Housing Association	42
Conclusion	44

CASEReport 135

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown that followed created a unique set of circumstances: people over 70 and those with underlying health conditions were forced to self-isolate; day to day activities stopped; people began working from home and were cut off from families and friends. The forced closure of many businesses created economic anxieties and nine million people were put on furlough, the government wage subsidy scheme which allowed people to be paid when they could not work. The virus put extra pressure on NHS staff and carers who had to continue their day to day duties, reduce spread of the virus, and care for those who had developed it.

In response to these unprecedented circumstances, a wave of community spirit spread across the country. 750,000 people signed up to the NHS volunteer scheme, 250,000 signed up to local volunteer schemes in the first 3 weeks of lockdown¹, and there are countless examples of small local initiatives to raise people's spirits such as community gardens. Alongside this wave of volunteering, there was a surge in the formation of mutual aid groups. There are now 43000 mutual aid groups across the country.

Mutual aid is defined as:

“A mutual aid group is a volunteer-led initiative where groups of people in a particular area join together to support one another, meeting vital community needs without relying on official bodies. They do so in a way that prioritises those who are most vulnerable or otherwise unable to access help through regular channels”²

LSE Housing and Communities has a long-standing interest in the role of mutual aid in helping to tackle community problems. As the outpouring of volunteer and mutual aid interest took hold, we set out to capture the community response to the pandemic and understand the role that mutual aid groups were having in helping people in communities.

In total, we contacted 70 mutual aid groups and selected 20 to be the main focus of our research. We conducted telephone interviews with the leaders and volunteers from the groups. Our main findings are available in our report “Community Responses to the Coronavirus Pandemic: How mutual aid can help”. We also had conversations with organisations such as housing associations that were going above and beyond their everyday duties to support their tenants.

This report contains 21 case studies we uncovered in the course of our research. The groups represent a range of type, size, and geographical locations of groups. We hope the case studies demonstrate the amazing work that the groups are doing to support their local communities. This research was conducted between May and September 2020 and the information in this report reflects information that was gathered during this period.

¹ Patrick Butler. A million volunteer to help NHS and others during Covid-19 outbreak. April 2020. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/13/a-million-volunteer-to-help-nhs-and-others-during-covid-19-lockdown>

² Covid-19 Mutual Aid. Covid-19 Mutual Aid. April 2020. Available at: <https://covidmutualaid.org/>

1. Furloughed Foodies

“Furloughed foodies set off on a mission to feed all those who are struggling the most in the pandemic and the people we concentrated on initially were NHS doctors fighting on the frontline. We then expanded our support to homeless shelters and food banks. We wanted to empower and help people who are furloughed and with struggling being at home unable to work”



Meals ready to be delivered

Why the group was formed

Furloughed Foodies was set up with the mission to feed those who were struggling the most with the pandemic, beginning with NHS doctors and nurses and expanding their support to homeless shelters and food banks. The founder wanted to feel like he “wasn’t just a passenger” in the crisis and to give something back to the NHS. He wanted to help give people, particularly those who had been furloughed, a sense of purpose.

Group organisation and structure

The founder began by approaching friends and family over social media asking them to provide sponsorship for him to cook meals for his friend, who was a doctor, and their colleagues. The friend had said they would like healthy home-cooked food to help them on their shifts. Following this, he was put in contact with other hospitals across London. As demand grew, he realised he needed other volunteers to help cook and distribute the food. A friend set up an Instagram account to ask for more donations and volunteers. Within six weeks, Furloughed Foodies had raised £25,000 and recruited 400 volunteers. The group now has 700 volunteers signed up and seven key organisers including a fundraiser, head of social media, and two operations leaders who coordinate the volunteers and create



A pair of doctors with their food

the timetables, one for the North and East of London and one for the South and West of London. The volunteers are a range of ages, from school leavers to retired; ethnicities; and about 50/50 male and female. Only 250 of the volunteers are currently working as the group does not have enough funds for them all to cook and distribute food. To help ensure

anyone can help out, the volunteers are always given the money to cover the cost of the food and petrol for delivery.

To help raise more funds the group reached out to various companies and they now have four companies donating money. They are also in the process of setting a sponsorship programme where an organisation could provide sponsorship for three months to support a specific hospital.



A group of doctors with their meals

Impact

So far, the group has provided 10,000 meals across 15 hospitals.

Future of the group

The group is currently thinking about what its role will be after lockdown eases, and it is keen to continue as long as there is a need for them. As people start to go back to work, they will lose volunteers, but they are hoping to have a structure in place that can mobilise quickly if there was an increase in demand in the future.

2. Dons Local Action Group

“There are people who have done lots of volunteering before but we have also uncovered lots of novice volunteers like me, I would love to get a point where people thought I have 3 or 4 hours free in my week how can I help people because we are going to need to support people going forward.”

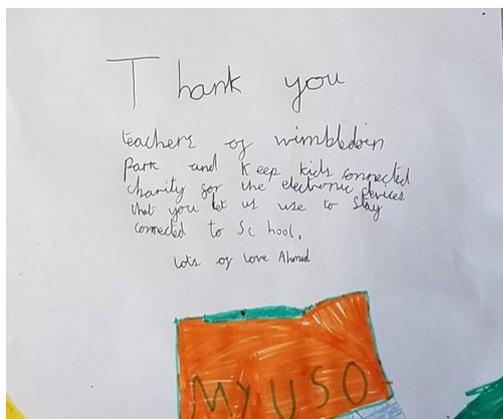
Why the group was formed

Dons Local Action Group was set up by a group of AFC Wimbledon Football Club fans who were fundraising

for a new stadium. When lockdown was announced they realised they had a team of people who could quickly help those in need in the local community. They teamed up with three local rugby clubs and a network of local parents. They now have a team of 30 organisers and 800 volunteers.

Group organisation and structure

The group helps people across the London boroughs of Merton, Wandsworth, and Kingston. They have divided the areas into hubs, each of which has a leader. The group has 20 supermarket teams which stand outside supermarkets collecting food. This food is then distributed to the hubs and divided up into food parcels which are delivered to people in need. The group also delivers food to local food banks. After a couple of weeks, the group realised that some children were struggling to do schoolwork during remote learning, because they did not have access to a computer. The group started collecting laptops that were no longer needed and distributing them to families. They have also helped



A thank you letter from a child who was given a laptop



Food ready to be sorted at one of the Hubs

people without ovens, fridges and televisions by providing goods. There is a team of drivers who collect and distribute all the provisions. The group also has a phone line which people can ring if they feel lonely and want someone to talk to.

Anyone can volunteer for the group, but they require the people who are coming into direct contact with

vulnerable people to have a DBS check. Volunteers are recruited through sports clubs, parents' networks and social media. There is a mix of men and women volunteering across all ages, from 16 to 70. People volunteer varying amounts of time, from full time in the case of the main organisers, to a couple of hours a week. In total, the group have volunteered 5000 hours of time.

The group has received about £20,000 in grants from local foundations and has raised £30,000 through a Just Giving Page.

Impact

Across all the forms of support, the group has helped 10,000 people. At first, they thought they would mainly be helping elderly people, but they found that the elderly were receiving more support from the council than other vulnerable groups. As a result, Dons Local Action Group have also supported a number of families where the parents are out of work. Two-thirds of the people being helped are referred by organisations such as local councils, The Metropolitan Police and Age UK. The other third are people who have contacted them directly having heard about the group through word of mouth or social media. Demand for the group's help is still increasing despite lockdown easing.

Future of the group

The group hopes it will continue to tackle food poverty after lockdown lifts. They are currently reviewing what capacity people will have to help going forward, and likely volunteer availability. They feel their model of collecting food outside supermarkets works well but they may have to scale back the number of shops they collect from once people start to go back to work.



A food collection stand outside a supermarket

3. Chorley Buddies

“The group was set up to deal with isolation and loneliness because of COVID-19. It is whatever we can do to ease the problems. We phone people, we do shopping for people and we pick up people’s meds, do dog walking, mow lawns, clear drains. Whatever we can to help people.”

Why the group was formed

Chorley Buddies was set up in the first weeks of the lockdown to help people struggling with loneliness and isolation in Chorley, Lancashire. The group was formed by the organiser of a pre-existing church group. When the lockdown was announced the organiser sent an email out to group members and they decided their priority should be setting up a phone buddy service for people self-isolating.

Group Organisation and structure

Following an email exchange, a phone company offered the group software which allowed them to set up a virtual call centre. All the call volunteers have an app on their phone and there is a central Chorley Buddies number which people can ring. The app then directs the call to whoever is available. The group also helps people who need shopping and prescription pickups. People requiring assistance are posted on the notice board on the app and a volunteer will agree to help them. The notice board also provides a platform for the volunteers to get to know each other.

The group was set up very quickly; initial emails were sent on the 15th March and they had the system in place in by the 21st. At first, the group were not getting any calls, so they linked up with the local council who now refer people who have rung their emergency helpline to Chorley Buddies.

The group has one main organiser and 13 volunteers. The initial volunteers came through the church group, but people have also joined who heard about the group through word of mouth and the council’s volunteering database. All the volunteers must be DBS checked and take part in safeguarding training. The main organiser also organised for the “phone buddies” to take part in an online training session from an NHS telephone therapist. The main organiser and the three main shoppers work nearly full time, and the other volunteers work around 6-12 hours a week. There are 8 female volunteers and 5 male, the majority of which are retired, and a smaller number aged 30-40.

The volunteers reported that they have got a lot out of the experience. The main organiser said the volunteers have said it is a “lifeline” as it helps keep them busy. One volunteer we spoke to said the group has helped her deal with death her of her father by keeping her busy and making her feel like she is doing something useful with her time.

Impact

The group has helped 55 people so far, some weekly and some with one-off support. The group mainly helps elderly people who are self-isolating. At the start of lockdown, the group were also shopping for families, but they have now managed to organise regular online deliveries for these families.

Future of the group

After lockdown lifts the group hopes it will continue in some form and they are currently thinking about how this will work. Chorley Buddies think they have identified people who would have struggled with tasks such as shopping before lockdown began, and that some of the people they have helped will continue to need support after lockdown lifts.



Chorley Buddies leaflet advertising the groups support

4. Prince Rupert Hotel, Shrewsbury

“We have identified 5 individuals that we want to stay in the hotel and continue to work with them and keep them clean from drug addictions and alcohol. We want to try and help them rehabilitate; it may take several months. It will be our cost but having gone this far and seen their improvements, it is amazing, and we want to continue”

Why the group was formed

Like all hotels across the country, the Prince Rupert Hotel in Shrewsbury was forced to close at the start of lockdown. The owner of the hotel was concerned about how he would spend his time and the future of the business. Following closure, he was contacted by the council asking if the hotel would be willing to provide accommodation for rough sleepers in Shrewsbury during the lockdown. After discussions with his team, they agreed to house and support 25 long term rough sleepers in the hotel.

Group Organisation and structure

To allow the hotel to provide the accommodation safely, the owner, manager and accountant moved into the hotel full time so there would be 24-hour support availability, and to ensure that the virus would not be spread between the hotel and their families.

The council provide the hotel with a contribution towards their basic costs, such as insurance, but the project would not have been possible without the hotel's bank, Handelsbanken, freezing mortgage payments and increasing the hotel's overdraft. Business rates payments were also halted. Without this, the owner would not have been able to afford to house the rough sleepers and would have had to furlough all his staff.



Hotel staff and individuals being housed outside the hotel

Impact

Many of the 25 people being housed had been on the streets for over ten years and living in the hotel was a big adjustment. They are being offered other support services online to help with addiction and mental health problems, and the council provided laptops to enable this virtual support.

The owner of the hotel says the experience has changed how he views homeless people. By talking and getting to know the individuals he now has a much better understanding of their experiences and problems such as addiction.

Future of the group

The hotel plan to keep housing five of the individuals long-term and give them employment in the hotel. They already have one individual working in the kitchen who wants to be a chef and others are gardening and cleaning. A couple of the rough sleepers who used to work as decorators asked to help repaint the hotel. The council have assured the hotel team they will rehouse all the individuals once lockdown lifts.

5. Local food collection for foodbanks

“At the start of the lockdown, like so many people we wanted to help in some way, it was so obvious how much need there was but we didn’t know how to help. We were going to take some food to the food bank our self and my wife said why don’t we just see if anyone local wants us to take for them because we have a car. So, we sent out the first email and we were surprised by how many people replied”

Why the group was formed

At the start of the pandemic, Paul and his wife decided they wanted to help people in need and would take a delivery of food to their local food bank. They then had the idea of asking other local people if they wanted to donate food which they would then drop off. They began by sending an email to people they knew locally. Following a positive response, they posted on social network “Nextdoor” and the online pinboard of their children’s school. Their children also made a sign which they put up outside their house saying they were collecting food for the local food bank.

Group organisation and structure

People either drop food off at their house or they go and collect it from people who are unable to bring it themselves. Some other people in the local area are now doing mini-collections on their street and delivering them to the family to pass on to the food bank. The core of the group is made up of just the family, but there is a wider network of people who drop food off or run a mini-collection.

Impact

The family now do a weekly delivery of about 40 bags of food to the food bank. The organiser says the experience has allowed him to talk to people in the community that he wouldn’t normally have spoken to. He had never participated in this type of community work before and he hopes he will continue in some form after lockdown lifts.

6. South Milford Isolation Group

“We mainly respond to shopping requests from people who are isolating and need groceries. We have other volunteers who phone people for a chat to help with loneliness. We also do random other things, we have one individual who had health problems whose garden was a real mess so he couldn't use it, so we got a couple of volunteers to tidy it up for him”

Why the group was formed

The South Milford Isolation Group was set up at the start of lockdown by the local Parish Church and the Parish Council of South Milford, North Yorkshire, who realised local people in the village would need support during the pandemic.

Group organisation and structure

The group mainly does food shopping for people who are self-isolating and also has a phone line for individuals struggling with loneliness. They also carry out other tasks people may need help with such as gardening. As well as physical help, the group create leaflets with useful information such as where to go for financial support.

The first thing the group did was send out a leaflet with a number and email people could contact if they needed help, the leaflet also asked people if they would like to as well as advertising for volunteers. They now have 49 people signed up to volunteer, however there is not enough work for them all to do. To help keep the volunteers engaged they all have access to an online document where people can see what is happening and share ideas about what else they think the group should do. The online document is also used to delegate tasks to the volunteers. All volunteers must go through a self-certification process in place of a DBS check, as the leaders felt this would have taken too long to organise.

Impact

So far, the group has helped 30 people, in most cases this is weekly help for example with shopping. Most of those supported by the group have been elderly, or self-isolating due to health conditions. All the people the group help have rung up one of the numbers on the leaflet, either a dedicated mobile

number for the group which is monitored by one of the key volunteers, or the vicar's landline phone.

They are planning on doing another leaflet delivery soon in case anyone has forgotten about them.

The group has allowed people to get involved in the community who previously had not been, and the main organiser hopes this will continue after lockdown lifts.

7. Kensal Green Mutual Aid Group

“In my mind, one of the key things is that mutual aid groups don’t have the eligibility criteria attached to some of the more normal forms of help. It helps ensure people don’t fall through the gaps if they don’t in the criteria”

Why the group was formed

The Kensal Green Mutual Aid Group was set up to help anyone who needed assistance living in the 6000 households in the Kensal Green Ward.



A food collection ready for delivery

Group organisation and structure

The group began life as a very informal WhatsApp group set up by a local resident, but they quickly established an organised system to delegate tasks to the volunteers. They now have a central email contact and phone number which the main organisers take turns monitoring. The ward has been divided into street teams, where each task is delegated to. A project manager became involved in the group and helped set up this system and delegated different organisational tasks to people who she knew would have the right skills.

One of the key organisers was concerned that this very organised system, although very effective in helping people, meant the group has lost some of its “neighbour to neighbour spirit” that the group started with. She was trying to organise some fun activities to lift spirits, including a community festival where different performers drive around in cars and people come out of their houses to listen.

The main tasks the volunteers help people with are shopping, collecting prescriptions, and friendly phone calls for people who need someone to chat to. The group have also produced advice documents on claiming benefits and where to go for financial advice. The group work closely with “Elders Voice”, a charity supporting elderly people in the Brent area. Initially, a lot of the charity’s drivers who were delivering food went into isolation, so they referred people to Kensal Green Mutual Aid and now when Kensal Green Mutual Aid receive more complex cases where they feel they aren’t qualified to properly support they refer them to Elders Voice. On top of this, a local restaurant owned by a husband and wife has been cooking 2000 curries a day for people in need across the whole of Brent,

and a volunteer from the group goes every day to collect the curries and distributes them to people in Kensal Green. This initiative was funded by a Kickstarter fund which raised £100,000.

The group have reached people through leafleting and advertising on Facebook. They felt it was important to use a mix of digital and non-digital advertising to help ensure they reach everyone needing help.

The group has 10 key organisers and 15 regular volunteers, but there are 175 people in the WhatsApp group. Initially, there were more but the organiser thinks they lost people in the first weeks because it was so unorganised. All the volunteers have to fill in a form online as well as an ID and self-declaration check in place of a DBS, as they felt it was unrealistic for all the volunteers to complete a DBS check at such short notice. The volunteer's range in age from 25-50, and one volunteer who is aged 73. It was very important to the organiser they made the volunteering accessible to everyone. The organiser would consider all the volunteers "middle class" which reflects the demographic of the area.

The group currently does not receive any funding. Brent Council made grants of £500 available, but the group felt as Kensal Green is an affluent area, they should leave the money for other groups who may need it more. The group have just set up a fundraising page on Open Collective, an online platform which is an extremely transparent way of fundraising and managing funds in which everyone can see how the funding is being spent.

Impact

So far, Kensal Green Mutual Aid Group have received 215 calls, 180 of which were in the first six weeks of lockdown. They encourage volunteers to build relationships with people so they can continue helping them privately and they do not have to go through the central number every time they need help.

Future of the group

The group are considering their role after lockdown and are planning an online session to collect everyone's ideas. An aspect they believe is very important is that there is no form of eligibility to the groups support, unlike more formal forms of help, and they are open to supporting anyone in need. They feel this allows them to help people that might otherwise fall through the gaps. The organiser hopes the relationships that people have built in the community will continue. She also feels the need for food provision will continue after lockdown lifts so they are thinking about how they can make the food provided by the local restaurant sustainable long-term.

8. Sway Village Volunteers

“Lots of people were helping each other out informally and I saw on the news that people were putting round little leaflets offering help. It struck me what might happen to people who slip through the net. So, I put together a leaflet coordinating with different local groups and organised it to be delivered to all the houses in the village”

Why the group was formed

Sway Village Volunteers, based in the New Forest in Hampshire, was set up to help people during the pandemic that might otherwise slip through the net. The organiser of the group felt the church and local charity, who would normally support local people would not have had the capacity to help all the people that would need support during the lockdown, particularly those who lived alone. The group was formed in collaboration with the church and local charity.

Group organisation and structure

An email was sent out to all members of the church and there was a post on the local Facebook group asking for volunteers. As a result, 80 people signed up to help. A leaflet was created with information of where people could go for support and included the church office number which people could ring if they needed help. The leaflet was posted to all houses in the village. This whole process only took three days.

All the volunteers are under 70 but range in age from school leavers to people in early retirement. At first, there were lots of mums with young children helping but this became less practical when the schools closed.

The church takes all the calls for help which then get passed on to the main organiser who delegates tasks to the volunteers. The organiser tries to match volunteers with people she thinks will share similar interests and “really lovely friendships are forming” that she hopes will continue after lockdown. They always try and pair people on the same day they ring so they can be helped as soon as possible. The main thing people are being supported with is shopping. The group initially thought they would receive lots of phone calls for people who were lonely, but only two people have wanted this service as most people have lots of family and old friends ringing them regularly.

Impact

So far, the group has helped 40 people, with most of the requests for help being in the first weeks of lockdown.

Future of the group

The process has helped identify people in the village that are vulnerable and may need help going forward. The group are thinking about how they will be able to continue to support these individuals after lockdown lifts.

9. Scrub Hub Durham

“The scrub hubs are a good way more elderly people can get involved and help people, a lot of them are shielding, it is nice for them to get the fabric dropped at their door and to go and pick it up so they feel like they are doing something ”

Why the group was formed

“Scrub Hubs” are teams of volunteers who sew scrubs, which are then distributed to local hospitals, nursing homes, hospices and opticians. The Scrub Hub Durham was set up by an individual who heard about the Scrub Hubs over Facebook and realised there was no hub in the North East.



Scrubs ready to be delivered

Group organisation and structure

The organiser began by putting her details on the central Scrub Hub website³ so volunteers could email her if they wanted to help, as well as organisations being able to get in touch with orders for scrubs.

90 people got in contact and 40 of them are making scrubs. To help ensure the scrubs are made to a high standard and can be used long-term volunteers are required to have sewing experience and have an overlocker machine to ensure they are finished to a high standard. The main organiser orders all the materials which are then sent to a volunteer who does the cutting. The pre-cut sets are then sent to other volunteers who sew them together. They found this was the best way to do it as some of the more elderly volunteers were struggling to do the cutting themselves. All the completed scrubs then go back to the main organiser who distributes them to organisations that have ordered them. The Scrub Hubs allow people to volunteer who cannot be involved in other forms of volunteering such as delivering food because they are self-isolating. At first, the main organiser was doing all the deliveries herself but as demand grew, she found it was easier to use a delivery service.

³ <https://scrubhub.org.uk/>

The Scrub Hub has a Go Fund Me Page to raise money to cover the costs of the materials and so far, they have raised £4300.

Impact

So far, Scrub Hub Durham have delivered 235 sets of scrubs.

10. Brockenhurst Parish Church Covid-19 Support Group

“People ring us, and we pair them with a volunteer local to them and then we let them make their own arrangements. It has worked absolutely brilliantly, and people have been so appreciative knowing that help is there if they require it”

Why the group was formed

In Brockenhurst, Hampshire, there was a pre-existing group known as Brockcare, which was linked to the church and organised weekly lunches, coffee mornings, cinema afternoons and day trips, and transport. These activities are normally attended by elderly members of the community. When lockdown was announced, the group could no longer continue their activities, but they knew a lot of the regular attenders would need support so they established the COVID-19 Support Group.

Group organisation and structure

The group began by putting a leaflet through every door in the village with the church phone number and the main organiser's phone number which people could ring if they needed any support. They also put a sign-up list in the back of the church for people to sign up to volunteer. At the same time, other small support groups had formed around the village and they decided to work together. In total the Group has 140 volunteers signed up to help, but only 70 are actively volunteering as there is not enough demand for them all to have a role. All volunteers must have a DBS check.

Once someone has contacted the group requesting help they are matched with a suitable volunteer. The main activities are helping people with shopping and providing a phone buddy service. At first, the group were also collecting and delivering prescriptions, but the village pharmacy now does home deliveries. A lot of the volunteers are over 70 so these volunteers act as the phone buddies and the younger volunteers do the shopping. Once the organisers have matched people with volunteers, they let them make their own arrangements.

Impact

So far, the Brockenhurst Parish Church COVID-19 Support Group have paired 60 people with volunteers. In the first weeks of lockdown, they received a lot of calls but now the rate has slowed down as people needing help have been paired up.

The group has received a lot of positive feedback from both the volunteers and the people being helped. It has helped bring the community together and helped people form new friendships.

11. My Music Northamptonshire

“We thought we had to at least try and run the sessions online, the project aims to reduce carers isolation which has just been made worse by the lockdown. Every week we have a series of musical activities and they can plug into as many as they like. We have online ukulele tutorials, we had the ukuleles delivered to carers in their homes. I think people engage with that the most because they are all holding an instrument. We also do online songwriting sessions on Zoom, they put forward ideas for lyrics and then the musicians try and put them into a song. We also do Zoom chat and coffee sessions so people can get the social interaction as well”

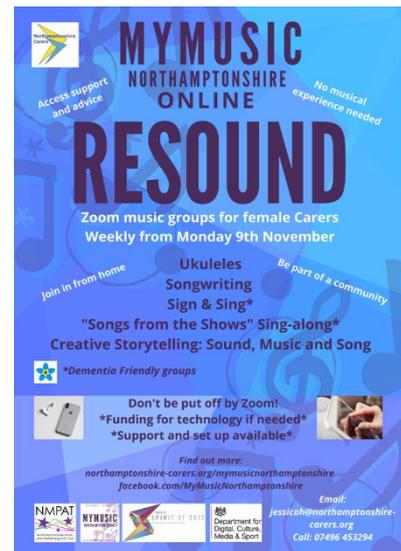
Why the group formed

My Music Northamptonshire was a pre-existing group aimed at supporting female carers of all ages through musical activities. It is a partnership between Northamptonshire Carers, a local charity supporting carers, and The Performing Arts Trust. The project is funded by the Spirit of 2012 Fund and the Tampon Tax. The group wanted to continue supporting people during lockdown and not waste the preparation that musicians had done for the sessions, so made a decision to move online. One of the main aims of the group is to reduce the isolation of carers, something they feared would get worse in lockdown.

Group organisation and structure

The group now runs a series of musical activities online. The most popular session is a ukulele class and all of the people taking part had a ukulele delivered to their house. The organiser feels this kind of session has the best engagement because people are holding a physical instrument. They also organise an online song writing course where people suggest lyrics and the musician develop them into a song. As well as the music sessions they run online coffee mornings which give people the chance to get to know each other.

The sessions are predominately advertised on a Facebook group for female carers in the area. They have also had an article in the local paper which allowed people to find out about the sessions who may not be on Facebook



poster advertising My Music's online sessions

Impact

The group now has 25 people regularly engaging in the sessions. Before lockdown, they never had designated time for people just to chat and the organiser says this has allowed more in-depth conversations to happen and friendships are starting to form. The feedback from the carers involved is extremely positive, they say it is good to have something to look forward to and helps them escape from their situation for an hour each day.

Future of the group

One of the major barriers to carers engaging in services is not being able to leave the house due to lack of stand-in care. Having the sessions online removes this problem and allows people to engage who may not otherwise be able to. The group is considering keeping some sessions online after lockdown lifts to improve this accessibility. However, they do feel having the sessions online means people are engaging less in the music.

12. Moseley Together

“We recognised we needed to put something together locally and I do a lot of stuff with the Community Development Trust, so I teamed up with them, local councillors and a few other community people. We set up a model where we would have a central phone number and email. Then we split the area up into 8 polling districts, then we found local residents we knew and trusted to act as coordinators for that area”

Why the group formed

When the lockdown was announced it was realised that many members of the local community of Moseley, South Birmingham, would need support. A group of local councillors, the Community Development Trust, and other individuals working in the community teamed together and formed Moseley Together.

Group organisation and structure

The group set up a central phone number and divided the area into eight polling districts. They asked residents they knew and trusted in each district to be the community coordinators. The group began by recruiting volunteers through leafleting and set up a website for the group. The volunteers were then put in contact with their local coordinator. 350 volunteers signed up to help, but there are more volunteers than is needed. All volunteers must agree to have their details stored on a central system and they ask for volunteers in certain roles to have DBS checks. There is an equal distribution of female and male volunteers. The volunteers are all of White British and Asian ethnicity.

People needing help ring the central number and are then referred to a community coordinator who puts them in contact with a volunteer, so they can make their own arrangements. People generally find out about the group through leafleting and on Facebook.

As well as pairing people with volunteers the group is also working with the charity Brum Together to deliver food parcels. The charity put together the food parcels which are then collected by the Moseley Together volunteers and distributed to people in need. The referrals for the food parcels come from support workers, and the group feel that these referrals are to individuals who would have not otherwise contacted them. Delivering the food parcels also allows the volunteers to ask if they would like any other support, and can help people to engage with the group.

Impact

So far, Moseley Together have helped 200 people with requests. In most cases this is ongoing support through weekly shopping. They have also delivered 40 food parcels and have a team of volunteers sewing face masks for the local sheltered accommodation scheme, who were initially shielding but are now starting to want to go out more.

Future of the group

The group are hopeful it will continue to support people after lockdown lifts. It has created a WhatsApp group with the local leaders of each ward to try and create a plan for what their role will be going forward. They think having the support of the Community Development Trust will be extremely helpful as they have paid staff who will be able to support the group when many of the volunteers go back to work after the end of furlough. As well as supporting individuals, the group is starting to explore how they can support local businesses who may be struggling due to the lockdown restrictions.



Are you unable to leave your home because of COVID-19?

- Do you need help with shopping, prescriptions or other errands?
- Do you feel isolated and need someone to talk to?

We can help. We're local volunteers, working to help people in our community during the COVID-19 crisis.

07796 668257 **info@moseleytogether.org.uk**

Moseley Together

A leaflet advertising Moseley Together's support

13. Grange Association Helpers

“I think for us it just felt like the right thing to do and we can, we are all fit and healthy and a lot of people around here aren't. Both of our parents aren't nearby so we can't help them, so the people we would naturally do things for aren't around. I think there is an element of paying it forward, I would like to think someone would help them”

Why the group was formed

The Grange Association is a volunteer organisation based in Edinburgh supporting and protecting community interests, the environment and local history. They organise events such as litter and leaf picking, speaker events about local history, and produce a local newsletter every three months. When lockdown was announced they held a committee meeting to plan how they could support people in the local community.

Group organisation and structure

Within a week, the group had posted 2800 leaflets through people's doors asking for volunteers and providing a number people could ring if they needed support. They now have 380 volunteers and have had 40 requests for help. Each person who requests help is paired up with a volunteer who lives nearby. In some cases, they have paired individuals with two helpers, so that the volunteers do not become overwhelmed as many of the requests have been for on-going support. Some of the volunteers are also helping other people they know but were not paired up through the Grange Association.

The Association is working closely with the community police team to ensure that people they are supporting do not become vulnerable to scammers. They have also set up a safeguarding scheme to protect both the volunteers and the people being helped. For the new volunteers, that are not already members of the Grange Association, they set up an ID and address check.

Impact

So far, the group have had 40 requests for help. The group has also bought benefits to the volunteers. As a result of volunteering many people have joined the Grange Association for the first time, and they now feel more connected to their community. The volunteers we spoke to said they want to help at future community events and do more to support the Grange Association.

14. Guru Maneyo Granth Gurdwara

“When we look at our teaching, we have the idea that in every Gurdwara there is a free meal, this is the case across the world, everyone can get a free meal no matter who they are. Before the lockdown, we were thinking about the people who attend our temple and elderly people in the local area. Just before the lockdown, there was a lot of issues of people fighting over things in supermarkets and we thought this is going to be very hard for the elderly so we put in place small hampers of essentials. That got picked up by the media and led lots of people ringing and saying they wanted help, the calls came from all over Berkshire and West London. What started quite small has escalated to us cooking 6000 meals a day”



A GMGG volunteer with a food delivery

Why the group was formed

The Guru Maneyo Granth Gurdwara (GMGG) is a Sikh Temple in Slough. Before lockdown was announced they realised elderly people in the community were struggling to get food due to panic buying that was happening in supermarkets. They put together food parcels and distributed them to elderly people in the community. This work got picked up by the media and they began to get phone calls from all over Berkshire and West London from people who needed help.

Every Sikh Temple offers a free meal to anyone who visits. The GMGG normally serve 10,000 meals a week cooked by a team of 300 volunteers. The Temple decided to utilise this team of volunteers and facilities on-site to cook and distribute meals for people in need during the lockdown.

Group organisation and structure

One of the key organisers works in the homeless sector so they began by contacting homelessness charities to ask if they would like food supplying. It grew from there to the point where GMGG is now cooking 6000 meals a day for 100 different organisations, including homeless charities, schools, food banks, and faith groups. All the meals are cooked at the temple and then distributed.

The volunteers we spoke to said they were motivated by the Sikh teachings of helping the vulnerable, and the Sikh history of standing up for people's rights. For them, it seemed natural to use the infrastructure and team they have in place to help people in need. They decided to use the existing

team of volunteer cooks to prepare the food as they were already trained, but they also provided extra COVID-19 food hygiene training. Other volunteers who collect and distribute the food are members of the temple and people who have heard about the project through the media and word of mouth. A lot of the volunteers were working full-time on the project. The leaders of the group think it is very important to support their volunteers, at the end of each shift they come together, have a cup of tea and discuss what happened on the shift so people can go away with clear minds.

At the start of the project, the Temple decided they would not take any financial donations for the work and they would fund it all. They have a collection box in the main hall which is used to fund support in times of crisis. The group have not done any marketing, and all of the engagement has all been done through word of mouth and existing connections. For example, one of the volunteers works in a Waitrose office, who spoke to his team about the project, who spoke to another team, and which lead to a large food donation from Waitrose.

Impact

GMGG provide 6000 meals a day for 100 different organisations including homeless charities, schools, food banks and faith groups

Future of the group

The leaders of the project are now considering how they can support children suffering from food poverty. They are in conversations with schools about how they can support access to food for these children. The group have also just started work with three organisations supporting undocumented migrants with no recourse to public funds, who previously supported themselves through cash in hand jobs and are no longer able to work due to the pandemic. Moving out of lockdown, members of the temple are concerned about mental health issues that will have arisen as a result of the crisis. They are working closely



Food being dropped off by a GMGG volunteer an elderly woman's house

with charities such as Mind to explore how they can support people. The group are looking to develop a programme which will involve setting up a support service run by volunteer therapists from the congregation.

15. Wixams & Wilstead Community Shopping Club

“The main concern we have had is about the volunteers going into supermarkets as people weren’t following social distancing. So, we decided we should only send a volunteer into the shop if we have to, that’s why we helped get everyone needing support registered for delivery. Some of them are now completely self-sufficient. For people who don’t have the internet, a volunteer will ring and take their order over the phone, put it in on Tesco’s online delivery form and another volunteer will go and collect it. No one has gone into a shop for 3 or 4 weeks”

Why the group formed

The Wixams and Wilstead Community Shopping Club

was set up by two Good Neighbours groups from

neighbouring villages in Bedfordshire, to support people

during the crisis. Good Neighbours groups are groups of local residents who offer support to people in

the community with shopping and giving people lifts to the doctors, amongst other things. Wixams is

a new housing development with a very young population. Before lockdown starting the Good

Neighbours group had very few volunteers and very few people requesting help. On the other hand,

Wilstead has a much older population with lots of people who would need support during the

lockdown. For this reason, the two groups decided to combine to set up the shopping club.

Group structure and organisation

The Wixams and Wilstead Community Shopping Club now has 90 volunteers signed up to help. The

vast majority of these are new volunteers who were not involved in the original groups. They were

recruited over Facebook and the websites for both villages. The Club requires every volunteer to

register and then carry out an ID check.

The group has two main roles. The first is helping people set up online food deliveries. They are very

keen to protect the volunteers and avoid any of them going into shops unless it is necessary. For the

people who are unable to order online themselves, a volunteer takes their order over the phone and

COMMUNITY SHOPPING CLUB

Wixams and Wilstead Community Shopping Club

We are here to support members of our communities who are required to self-isolate during the Covid-19 outbreak. We can help with:

- Shopping from a list
- Click & Collect collections
- Prescription collections

Due to the very real risk of contagion, we have put together a system that keeps human contact to an absolute minimum.

Are you self-isolating and need help?

To request help from the Community Shopping Club, please contact us using the details at the bottom of the page. We prefer e-mail. If you don't have access to e-mail, please work with someone you trust or call us.

PLEASE INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

- Shopping list / Click & Collect details / prescription collection details
- Full name
- Address
- E-mail address if possible
- Phone number

We take payment via bank transfer. If you don't have online banking, please contact someone you trust to pay on your behalf or call us if that's not possible

We will call you back and agree a deposit which will need to be paid for security reasons. We will then select a volunteer, who will contact you directly to check the details of your request and to arrange drop off details.

If you can use a Click & Collect shopping service we urge you to do so, as it will make the process easier for everyone. If you'd like to send us a shopping list, we prefer them to be sent by e-mail, either in text format or as a photo/scan.

Find out more: www.wixams.org/shopping-club
E-mail: shoppingclub@wixams.org
Telephone: 07929 656674
Facebook: fb.me/CommunityShoppingClub

A poster advertising the services the shopping club offers

organises the delivery. The Shopping Club has also formed a partnership with the local pharmacy and every day three volunteers will go and collect prescriptions and deliver them. So far they have delivered over 1000 prescriptions to people shielding or self-isolating.

Impact

The Shopping Club has provided shopping collection for 41 people, organised Click and Collect shopping for 37 people, and carried out 1000 prescription pickups. They have also helped 12 people set up online deliveries and become self-sufficient with their shopping deliveries.

Future of the group

After lockdown lifts, it is hoped that the two Good Neighbours groups will combine permanently. The Shopping Club has attracted lots of people that were not previously engaged in the groups, and they are keen to keep these people involved.

16. Cardiff Mutual Aid Group

“We have quite a few things going on, we do shopping for people and pharmacy drops. To do the pharmacy drops you have to have an enhanced DBS check. We make sure all the drops are sanitised and we follow certain guidelines. We did lockdown libraries, put shelves in phone boxes and then posted on the Facebook group for people to put in books, DVDs and plants, then people can come and swap them”

Why the group was formed

Cardiff Mutual Aid was set up to help people across Cardiff during the lockdown who may be struggling.

Group organisation and structure

The main tasks the group helps with are shopping and prescription pick-ups. So far, the group have had 140 requests for help. At the start of lockdown, the main organiser of the group set up a Facebook page and sent out leaflets asking for volunteers and advertising the group's services. The group have also set up lockdown libraries where they put up shelves in telephone boxes then invited people to go and put books, DVDs, and plants on the shelves which people could take for free.

The group have divided Cardiff into local areas, each of which has a local area coordinator. The group has a central phone which is available 24 hours a day and the 10 area coordinators take turn supervising the phone service. Requests for help are then delegated to the appropriate area coordinator over a Google Doc. The area coordinator will then post on the local WhatsApp group and assign the task to a volunteer. All volunteers receive guidance on how to carry out a sanitised shopping drop and the volunteers doing prescription pickups have to have an advanced DBS check.

Impact

The group are providing ongoing support for 140 people

Future of the group

The group want to continue to help people after lockdown lifts. They want to move into food provision for people who have been impacted by the pandemic. There is a local group currently providing 200 hot meals a day to people across Cardiff and they are in discussions with CRHG about

how they could support them. CRHG are also considering setting up a community garden as a longer-term goal.

17. Harlesden Mutual Aid

“I bumped into the women who runs the Community Kitchen and she wanted to do something to help, but she didn’t want to lead it so I said I would do it. It started with me and one other person delivering 200 meals then we put a post out on Facebook saying we are forming this group and would anyone be interested. Now we have 25 people helping”

Why the group was formed

Harlesden Mutual Aid was set up to distribute

meals to people in need in the Harlesden area of London. It was set up by the leader of the local Community Kitchen and an active member of the community.

Group organisation and structure

All the meals are cooked at the Community Kitchen or by members of the community who want to help. The meals are then delivered to the main organiser's house who boxes them up for each of the drivers to take to people who need them. The group mainly helps elderly people and people self-isolating and works closely with the local Salvation Army. The first people the group provided food for were already known to the Salvation Army, but as news of the group started to grow people would contact the founder directly requesting help for themselves or people they knew needing support. The group also supports people struggling with alcohol misuse, a problem they feel has increased during the lockdown, to ensure that these individuals get a good meal every day at the very least. The leader of the group signposts people they are helping to other groups in the local areas where they can get more support if useful.

When the group was first established, the founder was delivering all the meals himself. He then put a post on the local Facebook group asking for volunteers and the group now has 25 volunteer drivers, as well as people providing food on a one-off basis. The volunteers don’t have to meet any requirements other than living in the local area but when they join, they are read a clear set of rules they have to follow to be part of the group. Harlesden is a very diverse community, and while volunteers are



A Harlesden Mutual Aid volunteer distributing food parcels

mainly White middle class, members of all communities contact the group suggesting people who need support.

Working in partnership with the Salvation Army, who also provides meals to people in need, ensures that there is food available for those requiring support six days a week. The Salvation Army also provide administrative support to the group. They have provided all the groups policies, such as safeguarding, as they already had approved policies in place. The founder of the group is keen to ensure the Mutual Aid Group appears professional and something people are proud to be part of. As a result, he created a logo for the group as well as ensuring policies around safeguarding, hygiene, etc. are in place. He hopes the group will get funding for branded hoodies or t-shirts, so volunteers are recognisable as part of the group when they are out delivering food.

Impact

The group delivers 110 meals three times a week to local people in need.

Future of the group

Harlesden Mutual Aid Group is thinking about what its role will be after lockdown lifts. They believe the problem of isolation will still exist and people will continue to need support. They are hoping to organise outdoor exercise classes where people could meet other people and improve their fitness. They also want to work with other local groups such as Age UK and Mind to continue to support local people in need.

18. High Town Mutual Aid

“I wanted to set up a group of WhatsApp groups for different streets, where people can go for support. We now have 10 roads in the ward which have groups and each one has a central coordinator”

Why the group formed

High Town Mutual Aid was set up by a local community worker who also lives in the High Town area of Luton. He wanted to help local people connect to one another and have somewhere they could turn if they need help.

Structure and organisation of the group

The group is made up of 10 street-based WhatsApp groups in High Town. Each WhatsApp group has a street coordinator who set up the group and coordinates the volunteers. Each WhatsApp group has about 20 to 30 members. Each street coordinator posted a card through every door on their road with contact details for people to ring if they needed support and the details of the WhatsApp group if people wanted to volunteer. The founder's contact details are also listed on the Luton Council website, which people can use to request support directly.

The requests for help are mainly for shopping, prescription pick-ups and help with odd jobs such as gardening. Local street groups have also set up projects such as local newsletters, quizzes that are left on people's gates, and mini-libraries in phone boxes. The group found there were many more requests for help in the first weeks of lockdown, and that once there was more formal forms of support in place there was less demand for the group's services. The WhatsApp groups are very informal and they try and make it clear that there is no central organisation leading the groups. However, they have posted guidance, provided to them by larger organisations, on each of the WhatsApp groups on issues such as taking money for doing people's shopping.

Impact

So far, the groups have had 21 requests for help. In some cases, they are helping individuals on an ongoing basis.

19. Ponteland Community Group

“We came together at the start of lockdown because we were concerned that there would be lonely and elderly people in the community who would not have a support structure in place, we wanted to keep them safe”

Why the group formed

Ponteland Community Group was set up by a group of residents in Ponteland, Northumberland, who realised lots of people in the local community would need help during the crisis.

Group structure and organisation

The group began with a Facebook page to attract volunteers wanting to help. They spoke to the local parish council who allowed them to advertise their phone number for people to ring and request help. The group went on to set up a website and write an article in a local magazine to attract more volunteers and let people know about the help they were offering.

In order to become more organised, the group divided the town into 14 areas and gave each one an area leader who would delegate tasks to volunteers in that area. At first, they were just helping people with shopping and friendly phone calls. The group then set up an online shopping service with their local Waitrose, when they realised people were not able to get online delivery slots on the main website. People unable to go to the shops themselves could order up to 30 items using an online Google Doc, and volunteers would then collect the food together before the shop opened. Waitrose would then store it until another team of volunteers collected and delivered it. Ponteland Community Group have 150 people regularly using this service.

The group has 150 volunteers signed up to help but there were only enough requests for 60 of them to regularly volunteer. To utilise the rest of the volunteers, the group decided to set up a food collection scheme for food banks in the local area. They also put together toiletry bags for people in hospital whose families were unable to visit them and bring them supplies. They also have a team of volunteers making scrubs for local care homes.

Impact

Ponteland Community Group regularly helps 150 people with the online shopping service, as well as creating scrubs and putting together toiletry bags for people in hospital.

Future of the group

The group has had discussions about what its role will be after lockdown lifts. Unfortunately, they have decided they will have to close the group as the process of formalising the group would be a lot of responsibility for the leaders.

20. Caring for Carers

“The group was formed by a student who wanted to help. They started off posting on Facebook asking who would like to be involved. They then contacted NHS trust and care home managers asking if they would like meals”

Why the group formed

Caring for Carers is a support group for NHS staff and carers based in Glasgow. The group was set up by a local student who wanted to support people during the pandemic and show their support for NHS staff.

Group organisation and structure

The group began by delivering hot meals to hospitals and care homes across Glasgow during lockdown. They also offered services such as shopping and dog walking for staff. In recent weeks, as the first lockdown started to lift, demand for hot meals has reduced and they have started delivering snack boxes instead. They have also teamed up with a local homelessness charity to deliver food to homeless people across the city. The group is supported by several sponsors who provide funding, as well as restaurants and supermarkets who donate food.

The group made contact with the local NHS Trust and Head of NHS Volunteering in Glasgow, who put them in contact with the head nurses at the hospitals who could arrange the delivery times for meals. NHS Volunteers then distributed the food around the hospital. Caring for Carers also reached out to care home managers to ask them if they would like food delivered.

All the volunteers were recruited over Facebook and word of mouth. They are all part of a WhatsApp group where the leaders delegated the tasks. The group have been given access to a storage room where all the food can be stored until it is ready to be delivered.



A group of Caring for Carers volunteers with a food delivery

Impact

So far Caring for Carers have delivered 6200 meals and 1000 snack boxes to NHS staff. They have also provided support to a local homeless charity.

Future of the group

The group wants to continue supporting NHS staff, but they have heard from staff that they are starting to feel guilty about the amount of food and support they are receiving when other local and community groups are struggling. The group is starting to think about how it can support other people in need of food, and want to continue to work with the homelessness charity and expand this support to other organisations.



A group of nurses with a Caring for Carers food delivery

21. Curo Housing Association

Why the group formed

During the crisis housing associations have played a vital role in supporting their tenants and staff and many have gone above and beyond their day to day duties. One example of this is Curo, a housing association based in Bath, who have provided extra support for tenants in their 800 sheltered housing properties. Many of the tenants are over 80 and self-isolating due to the pandemic.



A VE day goody bag provided by Curo

Group Organisation and structure

At the start of lockdown, Curo staff rang everyone in their sheltered housing scheme to make sure they understood what was going on and check if they needed any support. They are now on the third round of ringing to make sure people are managing. They also ring their most vulnerable residents daily.

Curo publishes a regular newsletter to let residents know about the latest rules and restrictions, where they can get support, as well as puzzles and recipes they can make at home. They have done this to help the residents feel like they are still connected despite being at home.

Curo's Livewell officer has made it her top priority to improve the resident's physical, social and mental wellbeing during the lockdown. For VE Day, the Livewell officer packed goody bags for all residents in the sheltered housing scheme containing scones and jam, tea and coffee, colouring and puzzles, and a special VE Day newsletter. These were all delivered by hand, with the help of 20 volunteers from a local volunteering scheme. For many of the residents, this was their first human contact since the start of lockdown. The Livewell officer also organised a sunflower growing competition and shared the photos of the sunflowers with all the residents. This helped the residents feel connected to one another as well as giving them a sense of purpose. Curo has also just started is a pen-pal scheme. 30 children of Curo employees were asked to write letters to people living in the sheltered housing scheme, who will then write back.

The lockdown highlighted that many of the residents had no access to the internet. The officer teamed up with a charity offering free tablets and sim cards with 20Gb of data on. Curo was given 10 tablets which have been taken to people in the sheltered scheme. The Livewell Officer produced simple instructions on how to use the tablets, as well as offering one-to-one sessions for residents who needs more help to use the tablets. Residents who have received tablets are “over the moon” as for many of them it means they have been able to see their family, via video-calling services, for the first time since the start of lockdown. It also means they can access My Curo online where they can pay their rent, report repairs and talk to other tenants and staff on the portal.

One of the main concerns the Livewell Officer had was residents suffering muscle wastage from not being as active as normal, which makes them more vulnerable to trips and falls. She is now running gentle chair-based exercise sessions over Zoom. Once lockdown eases, she is planning on starting walking sessions as well.

To fit in all the activities on top of the officers day-to-day to duties she is going above and beyond her normal working hours, but she says this *“can be a challenge but seeing the residents faces when an activity is delivered is more than worth the hard work”*.



A Curo tenant with their sunflower growing kit

Conclusion

The case studies in this report demonstrate the impact of mutual aid groups in supporting people during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the benefits they bring to volunteers and beneficiaries. The groups provided support in many forms: food shopping; prescription pick-ups; providing meals; creating scrubs and housing homeless people. The groups were set up quickly and responded to local needs. In total, the groups in this case study attracted 3549 volunteers, many of whom were volunteering for the first time. The groups worked alongside more established support organisations but, in many cases they were helping people who may have fallen through the gaps of more formal support. The case studies show how vital these groups can be in supporting the community. However, for communities to be viable, they need wider social infrastructures. Mutual aid can work alongside this social infrastructure, and to support it.