GUIDE TO INFORMAL COMMUNITY GROUPS RESPONDING TO COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS)

This guide is meant as a starting point to help volunteers, leaders and those we are helping stay safe and to help you avoid unintended negative consequences while you do your best to help those in need. Each group will need to create their own ways of working tailored to suit the needs in their area and for their community.

Be aware this is a stressful time, misunderstandings and raised tempers might happen. Although 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 false allegations, stress, overload and even abuse.

BEFORE CREATING A GROUP

Before doing anything, check if anyone else has already set something up in your area. It’s always best to add to another group’s good efforts and working together will make an even better service for your area.

OBJECTIVES

If there are no groups in the local area think about your objectives. Be clear about what you want to achieve. It might be to help housebound people with shopping, to collect and deliver prescriptions, to organize a weekly telephone conversation for people who would appreciate that contact or to try to meet other needs you are aware of locally. Your objectives may well change over time as you work and learn more about what people are facing right now. Communicate well so activities are coordinated and expectations are managed.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Think about a risk assessment - looking at the risk to people being helped, volunteers and 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 and keeping a safe distance, washing hands before handling shopping. 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; certain named volunteers dealing with cash; maybe putting a limit on the cost of any shopping; 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).
**WELLBEING**

Think of ways to prevent volunteers receiving calls at inappropriate times of the day and night and ways to reduce the stress and demands on volunteers. How will you cover volunteers coming down with the virus? How will you support the volunteer? Do not volunteer outside the home if government guidelines say you should be self-isolating.

**EXPECTATIONS**

In moments like this everyone wants to help, which means people may offer too much and 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 reasonable 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 AWARENESS**

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. Have a privacy statement that you can give to people saying what you will use their information for and how long you will keep it. Collect only the minimum information required to do the job and dispose of it safely/delete it when no longer needed. Store the data safely, in a locked cabinet or password protected document, and have one person in the group who is responsible for the data, with a deputy. Only share what is necessary for volunteers to carry out a task, not all the individual’s information. Don’t give the data to other groups or organisations. Ask people not to share personal details of people needing support on social media.

**SAFEGUARDING**

Who can volunteer and how? There are ways to still help, even if self-isolating. Do you have a minimum age? Will a member of your group act as 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?

To report a Safeguarding concern for children or adults call Derbyshire County Council on 01629 533190.

Call the police on 999 in an emergency. If you are not a professional involved with the child or family, you do not have to give your name and your conversation will be treated confidentially.
FURTHER ADVICE FOR COVID-19 GROUPS

For further detailed advice please see our Covid-19 resources on our website: 
http://highpeakcvs.org.uk/index.asp?ID=212

If you need more information and guidance contact the staff at High Peak CVS on 01663 735350 or hello@highpeakcvs.org.uk we will be happy to help. Please note that the office is closed but we are all working from home and picking up voicemail messages and emails.

In creating this guidance document, we wish to thank our partners Derbyshire Dales CVS for offering their work as an example.