**Covid-19 Group - Guidance on Running a Volunteer Community Group**

This guidance is for new informal community groups. Initially, consider if you can work under an existing local group or organisation that already has procedures in place to keep people safe, insurance and is able to support volunteers.
***Local sources of help are listed at the end of this document.***

We suggest you register your group and look at advice available from:

* Your local County Voluntary Council <https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/contact/>

* For Merthyr Tydfil, this is Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil

**GENERAL ADVICE ON RUNNING YOUR GROUP**

1. Every community will need group coordinators to oversee their group and the work of volunteers. These could be well known and trusted people in your community such as a local councillor, the person who runs the local shop or the people already involved in running existing groups. People who have experience, organisational skills, can support volunteers and are trusted.
2. A group can be difficult to set-up and keep going. Establish a coordinating group (depending on the size of your group) of at least 3 or 4 people is ideal.
3. Give people clear roles so you share the workload – someone to look after volunteers, to oversee communications, someone to be in charge of safety, money, recruiting and support volunteers, promotion, social media, etc.
4. Do a risk assessment and write a risk plan *(****see COVID19 Group - Guide to Risk Assessment****).* Safety is the number one priority – how will you keep volunteers and the people who you support safe?
5. Make sure you follow the advice from Public Health Wales on not spreading Covid-19.
6. Make sure you get the help you need. Be realistic, there are some things you cannot help with. Contact your local Councillor or County Voluntary Council, who will be able direct you to where you can get further information and advice.
7. Only share personal and confidential information with a small number of people who need to access it. Keep information secure, and do not share personal, sensitive or confidential information on line.
8. Discuss and share group rules on social media.
9. Make sure your volunteers can be easily identified, with at least an ID card.
10. Keep a list of all the people you are helping and all your volunteers. Try to set this up securely on-line (for example, Google Docs), so more than one person can keep the information up to date.
11. Have a procedure that is confidential for raising safety / safeguarding concerns.
12. Your group will come across things that are difficult. You are not alone. Ask for support.

**HOW WILL YOU REACH OUT TO PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?**

One of the biggest challenges will be finding people who are elderly and most at risk, such as pregnant women and people with chronic conditions. Consider ways of reaching out to your community. The priority is to keep everyone safe. At all times, people need to wash their hands before and often when handling anything that will be shared with volunteers or the people you are helping such as cards, shopping, and if required, money. Many people do not like to ask for help and may need to be encouraged to talk about ***how they feel,*** for example if they feel lonely or isolated.

**Some ideas to consider:**

1. Identify street representatives or ‘street champions’ in each street who will take on the role of ensuring everyone in the street is contacted.
2. Post cards (these are preferable to leaflets as they are easier to handle) through people’s letter boxes with the group’s contact details and ask what help they need. Suggest people share the information safely with neighbours and friends by social media, phone, text or email.
3. Encourage people who want help to make contact on-line, by phone or text.
4. Try to copy cards used by other groups.
5. Even better - can you provide a link to an on-line form? This will save lots of work for the group and reduce contact and any chance of spreading Covid-19!
6. Don’t think too big - the bigger the area you cover the more chance someone will be missed – keep numbers manageable.
7. Use social media, for example, Facebook for keeping in touch with the community and your group.
8. Think about those people who do not have access to the internet or a mobile phone. Posting contact cards through letterboxes is still essential – especially for those most likely to need your support.
9. Loneliness and isolation – try to identify those with limited social networks, they may need help with social interaction as well as or instead of practical and medical help. Once identified, you can suggest they ‘opt out’ rather than ‘opt in’ for support and someone keeps in touch daily through a phone or video call (FaceTime, WhatsApp, etc.).
10. Put a poster with contact details up in places where people are likely to have to go such as food retailers, pharmacies, etc.
11. Ask those doing local deliveries (chemists, post offices, supermarkets, fast food outlets) if they can promote your group using their social media and through their phone calls and texts to customers.
12. Steps to think about when using the card method:
	* Follow Public Health Wales guidance on washing hands and social distancing rules (do not knock on doors unannounced!).
	* When printing and handling, wash hands thoroughly and often.
	* Place cards in to zip lock bag and use hand sanitiser regularly.
	* Keep a record of where post cards have been delivered and any places you cannot visit e.g. some flats are only accessible using a buzzer.

**SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS**

Community volunteers are kind enough to give up their time, so they will want to feel useful, valued and involved.

**How will you attract and support volunteers?**

1. Reach out to anyone who is well, has time and is able to give something back to their community. Use what works - the most tried and tested methods are social media, word of mouth (and now your cards!).
2. Be clever – use the cards (and on-line) to not only promote your group but ask who can volunteer and what they can help with. Lots of people want to help but don’t know how. You could add a list for the things you need – people with a current DBS check, promotional, social media, IT skills, etc.
3. Use posters to advertise the help that you are offering to also recruit volunteers.
4. Be clear about what you want volunteers to do so they can make an informed decision about getting involved such as how much time is required, need to use their phone, etc.
5. Ask your volunteers about how they can help – you may have health and safety people, bookkeepers, IT and others who can help. Find out what people need and match them with what volunteers like doing - dog walking, phone buddying, shopping, talking to people, etc.
6. Write, agree and share a Volunteer Agreement (***see Covid19 Group - Model Volunteer Agreement***) on social media and with volunteers.
7. Help volunteers keep in touch with each other using social media like a closed Facebook volunteers page or WhatsApp group.
8. Create a sense of identity (as well as help keeping people safe) by providing volunteers with ID badges.
9. Make sure a group coordinator has responsibility for the volunteers’ welfare. This work is challenging and fatigue can set in. Try to help volunteers manage their time and not do too much, how many houses / streets can they can they cover? How much time they can give and when? Make it manageable, think about setting up a rota, you may need more than one person covering an area to cater for volunteers who are self-isolating or become ill.
10. Make sure volunteers understand safety is the number one priority – it is essential to avoid spreading Covid-19 rather than try to work when they are tired and might be starting to feel ill. You may want to set up a buddy system so people can let each other know when they are starting and finishing.
11. Value your volunteers – encourage and support people. Can you thank each volunteer after every shift?
12. How will you keep volunteers and the people you help safe? Have a simple ‘Do’s and Don’ts List’ and place it on social media. Have a Risk Plan (***see Covid19 Group - Guide to Risk Assessment***).
13. Do not ask a volunteer to do anything that puts them at risk or they do not want to do. If a volunteer is asked to do something that they are not sure about, make sure they feel they can discuss this with a group coordinator.

**COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER: THE BASICS OF HOW A SCHEME CAN WORK**

Try to hold an up to date list of volunteers details held securely by the group coordinators (preferably on-line). Sharing a volunteer’s information should only take place with the permission from the individual volunteer and only with those people who need access to that information. It is important to understand what your community group can do and what it cannot. Make sure you get help for the things that you cannot help with.

As people who need help come forward, appoint a group coordinator to each volunteer, who will run through with them a few things such as:

1. To ask the volunteer for their contact details and to check their identity or reference (if they are not known to the group).
2. How this information is held and used.
3. Provide a name and contact number and explain that a volunteer will be in touch to introduce themselves.
4. To direct them to read the group rules and volunteer agreement.
5. To tell them how they will get something that identifies them and the group, such as a name / ID badge, when they come to the house.
6. Assign a volunteer (for example, a street champion and or buddy) in touch with the person needing support.

The next steps will be for the Coordinator to:

1. Confirm with the person needing support, which volunteer will visit and when and how they will identify themselves.
2. Contact the volunteer and ask them to confirm with the person requiring the support who they are and when they will visit.
3. Contact the volunteer and ask them to get in touch with the person to discuss what support they require.
4. If at any point, they are uncomfortable or unsure of anything, they can call their volunteer buddy or a group coordinator for guidance and support.

**KEEPING PEOPLE SAFE**

All groups will need to put in place measures that keep people safe and constantly review what works and what does not. Protecting and supporting volunteers and people supported is the NUMBER ONE priority. Please follow the guidance above and if you come across any issues then please speak to someone in your group or get further advice. Some things you can think about include:

1. Vulnerable people should be told not open their door to anyone they do not know.
2. Make sure volunteers do not go into people’s house if you are delivering shopping, medicines, etc, and minimise face to face contact.
3. Try to avoid handling money. Money cannot only be lost or stolen, it can also contaminate those handling it.
4. Have a procedure with an identified person to raise awareness and to explain how to raise safety and safeguarding concerns related to children, young people and adults at risk. This could be a concern raised from within the group or the wider community. Contact your local County Voluntary Council for advice and support or refer to the local advice available at the end of this guidance.
5. Do not share any bank or credit card security details and have very strict procedures in place if they are to be used for any transactions.
6. Be very careful when handling money and put in procedures to ensure money or cash is handled by as few trusted volunteers as possible, preferably with more than one volunteer.
7. Make a record of all money transactions and keep receipts.
8. Personal contact should be avoided. If there is contact, make sure hands are washed before and after any contact - do not run the risk of cross contamination.
9. Ask if any volunteers have an up-to-date DBS check. If so, you could use them when handling money and supporting vulnerable people. Can you identify which volunteers need a DBS check, or do they all need one?
10. Issue regular up to date Public Health Wales guidance on safety measures such as washing hands, social distancing and social isolation.
11. Keep up to date list of volunteers and the people receiving support.
12. Keep a record of which volunteer is doing what and when. Buddy schemes can help people check on each other and reduce the pressure on group coordinators.
13. Have a Risk Plan (***see Covid19 Group - Guide to Risk Assessment***). Share your risk plan with the group and on social media and review weekly.

**MANAGING MONEY**

Managing money is one of the biggest risks. What can you do to make sure you protect volunteers and people you are helping? Decide what the main risks are and what you will do to reduce those risks, and include them in your risk plan. Try to avoid handling any money if you can, as local shops may allow the payment of goods over the phone by arrangement. You can reduce your risk by:

1. Only allowing a small group of trusted individuals, coordinators or people with a current DBS check to handle money.
2. Not sharing any bank or credit card security details and have very strict procedures in place if any cards are to be used for any transactions, for example, not exceeding the £30 contactless limit.
3. Asking all volunteers to work in pairs when handling money or debit/credit card transactions and to text details to a group coordinator giving details of the person being supported, when they were given the money/card, and what for.
4. Confirming when a person supported received their goods, and take a photo of their receipt and record any change given.

**MANAGING INFORMATION**

1. Only collect information that people have agreed for you to collect and share.
2. Keep personal and sensitive information secure and only allow access by a few people who need to access it to run the group.
3. Do not share personal details on social media.

**PUBLIC HEALTH WALES ADVICE**

Always follow the guidance issued by Public Health Wales
<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>

**LOCAL SUPPORT IN MERTHYR TYDFIL**

1. **Support from Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil**

Contact Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil on 01685 353900/email enquiries@vamt.net To advertise volunteer roles, register your group on Volunteering Wales Website <https://volunteering-wales.net/vk/volunteers/search.htm>

1. **Safeguarding: Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Hub**Search on-line for Cwm Taf Safeguarding Hub or visit:

<https://www.cwmtafmorgannwgsafeguardingboard.co.uk/En/Professionals/MultiAgencySafeguardingHub/MultiAgencySafeguardingHub.aspx>