

People at the Centre Update 20



Grantown Here to Help and Grantown COVID-19 Mutual Aid A Community Resilience Best Practice Case Study

As it became clear that a lockdown was imminent and that vulnerable people would need additional support, our local minister, the Manager of the local YMCA and the Chief Officer of VABS (Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey) came together to create 'Grantown Here to Help.' At the same time a Facebook page 'Grantown COVID-19 Mutual Aid' was created. A Facebook request went out for volunteers to deliver leaflets to every household in the area as described above. With over 100 volunteers coming forward the following services were identified:

- Prescriptions (delivery to pharmacy from surgery and then collection of medication and delivery to relevant patient)
- Shopping
- Food provision for those in need (Gordon Strang and Sharon Hamilton were already referrers for the Aviemore Food Bank)
- Advice provision
- Creation of a crisis/hardship fund
- Call Handlers to manage a central phone line for all these services.

Foodbank provision became an unexpected early victim. Aviemore Foodbank was forced to close due to restrictions of numbers of persons allowed onsite by the landlord. This made the decision to open a Community Food Table much easier and Grantown YMCA offered its space.

In the meantime, funding was obtained through Community Resilience and donations were also coming in. Grantown Initiative provided the financial governance necessary to disburse funds. It cannot be understated, without a local community organisation to provide a bank account, governance and financial governance, any community resilience would have been extremely challenging.

The central phone line was staffed by volunteers using a 3CX system that enables any mobile to become an extension within the system.

Through negotiation with the local Co-op and Scotmid, a system was put in place for those over 70, shielding or self-isolating who required shopping. General and confidential benefits advice was available through a Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) volunteer with the support of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey CAB. And FareShare food provision was established with Aldi Aviemore from the commencement of lockdown with a volunteer collecting short-dated foodstuff each morning and within weeks, Grantown Co-op came on board too.

Crisis and hardship funds of between £100 and £300 were also made available. The hardship fund has provided funds to help pay for mobile phone top-ups, fuel and electricity top-ups and broadband payments.

The Community Food Table opened six mornings and two evenings each week throughout lockdown and at one stage was accessed by 25 people each day, with some clients collecting food for several households. It is estimated that around 250-300 persons were being supported through the Food Table from mid-May to mid-July. Throughout lockdown, catering volunteers used excess FareShare produce to make soup and ready meals which were available at the Food Table. In addition, volunteers provided discreet food deliveries to families and individuals known to be in need.

Older people locally reported hardship as a result of lockdown, which required them to stay at home and only go out for an hour a day. One pensioner stated: "I usually go out for about 4-5 hours but I am in and have the heating on all day and my fuel costs are at least a third higher than this time last year."

In order to ensure that people felt able to access the Food Table, it was promoted as 'addressing waste' (food that would otherwise have been thrown away by supermarkets), being available for people to collect for friends or neighbours in need, etc. As a community with a very-high proportion of households dependent on tourism, this community was hit very hard by lockdown. B&B owners had no

income for weeks, three large hotels closed in March that do not intend to re-open, staff were furloughed for an average of 13 weeks from January to March and cafes were unable to open.

Services were being wound down in September when there was a significant outbreak of COVID-19 in a local meat plant with 29 out of 40 staff testing positive. As around two thirds of staff were agency workers, they had been laid-off during lockdown and had only had six weeks back at work when they were all required to self-isolate. It was known that many of these staff members had accessed the Food Table and, in order to protect the wider community, it was recognised that it was essential that they could be provided with food. Again, local knowledge and local support ensured that food was provided to these workers.

I hope the foregoing gives a flavour of how community resilience protected the local community from extreme hardship during lockdown, protected the health of the most vulnerable, and finally, during the recent outbreak, protected the community for a potential community outbreak as opposed to containing it as a premises outbreak.