

People at the Centre Update 26

Humanitarian Assistance Angus Response Team (HAART) supporting an Angus that Actively Cares - A Community Resilience Best Practice Case Study

What was the problem?

Lockdown restrictions were introduced in March 2020 to control the spread of Coronavirus. This resulted in the most vulnerable people in Angus requiring additional support, either because they were shielding or because their usual support mechanisms were disrupted. The main areas to be addressed were help with shopping, prescription delivery and reducing the impact of loneliness and social isolation.

What did we do?

The unprecedented nature of the crisis called for an innovative approach.

Frontline emergency support mechanisms were developed and implemented through an initiative called Humanitarian Assistance Angus Response Team (HAART). The HAART was partnership between Angus Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), Angus Council and Voluntary Action Angus (VAA). VAA is the Third Sector Interface organisation in Angus. The HAART's vision was clear; that no one in Angus would be left unaided, and therefore it was agreed that support of any kind would be offered to ANY vulnerable member of the community who needed help.

Systems were quickly identified and developed to recruit and support 1000 volunteers to deliver prescriptions, provide shopping and/or emergency food parcels and befriending to those most in need. The Angus Council Access Line was used as a well-established and known contact number and the partnership was further strengthened with the addition of the Council's Children, Family and Justice, Communities and Welfare Rights Teams who assisted the volunteers with triage and support as well as frontline delivery. This enabled the HAART to enhance its exiting knowledge and experience and complimented the personal, holistic approach that people needed in order to cope in challenging times.

The processes in place also allowed for accurate collation of data required by Scottish Government and ensured that vulnerable people could be supported.

Enabling Factors

The key for this successful initiative and continuous partnership was a shared vision that no one would be forgotten and left in need. The partners embraced the situation, trusted each other's strengths and came seamlessly together to support vulnerable members of the Angus community.

The shared vision allowed a more flexible, holistic approach was also helped remove organisational structural barriers. The HAART created a new way of working effectively across multi-disciplinary teams from different agencies. In addition, Third Sector capacity was increased through improved collaboration of 20 Third Sector organisations. As a result, a new initiative called Angus Connect was created to ensure a joined up approach across the whole of the Third Sector in Angus.

The cooperation and resilience of partners was the highlight of the initiative. Effective communication was facilitated in a number of ways, but two key factors have been identified. Firstly, key staff were safely co-located at VAA HQ. This was possible because of the size and layout of the building. This meant that referrals and information could be shared immediately, and workers supported.

Secondly, the team created two online networks which allowed key partners to meet virtually several times a week in order to share best practice, keep focused on the vision and provide ongoing support to each other. These online platforms were Angus Connect, a VAA initiative for Third Sector organisations, and HAART which was a partnership response involving VAA, Angus Carers, Angus Council and Angus HSCP. These platforms were also key to supporting the governance and data collection during this initiative and shared leadership was the crucial to its success.

Although the response was very successful, this did not come without its challenges. It was recognised very early on that funding would be required in order to provide the appropriate support to the Angus community beyond Government support. VAA created a Crowdfunding page in order to support

people who could not afford to pay for their shopping and as a mechanism to pay for those who could. People also had the opportunity to 'pay it forward' to ensure no one was left behind. This resulted in VAA receiving over £28,000 in donations to support the response.

Outcomes

The volunteers responded to up to 140 requests a day and over the course of 5 months they supported 4,535 people. Both the volunteer and recipient gained benefits from the process as evidenced in the quotes below:

"It has helped me deal with being out of work. I have been kept so busy I haven't had time to dwell on things and it's kept my own mental health in check on a positive level" - Volunteer

"I have Multiple Sclerosis (MS) and cannot go out and I live alone, I needed an urgent prescription, for an MS related problem, I phoned them (HAART) and they were so helpful. A wonderful person came and brought my prescription. I am so grateful to them all, I don't know what I would have done without their help. Thank you so much." - Recipient

Next steps

Throughout the process there were many opportunities for learning and development across the partnerships. One of the unintended consequences was that all the agencies involved have accepted that this more collaborative way of working is more effective at true partnership going forward. The Angus Community Planning Partnership has coordinated learning events that are now leading to further action.

This has already impacted on how the organisations plan to deliver services in the future. By taking a multi-disciplinary team approach to service delivery, it allows better reach and more successful outcomes for the people of Angus. Building upon this new model, the partners will continue to deliver services to those most in need across Angus. This is a true reflection of our aim to create an Angus that Actively Cares.

We made a short film about the work of the HAART which can be viewed on the link below: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnNvtEPRmDI>