

**ALLIANCE Live and Community in Action interview with Rhona Sweeting from Southside Self Isolation Action Group – Transcript**

**24<sup>th</sup> April 2020**

**Georgina (the ALLIANCE):**

Hello and welcome to ALLIANCE Live the information and learning portal which brings you examples of innovative and integrated working taking across Scotland within Health and Social Care.

In today's episode we are joined by Rhona Sweeting the creator and admin of the Facebook group "Southside Self Isolation Supporters", a group which has brought together the community of Glasgow's Southside to support one another in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Good morning and welcome Rhona, thank you so much for joining us today.

**Rhona Sweeting:**

Hello Georgina, thank you for having me.

**Georgina (the ALLIANCE):**

You're very welcome, so first of all could I ask you a little bit about what inspired you to create this group and a little bit more about it?

**Rhona Sweeting:**

Absolutely, in my area of the Southside we have always had a very strong community with a lot of helpful individuals therein, and when this situation first began to emerge, being in a non risk category myself, I decided to ask if anyone in the community was looking for a bit of help and support. Well very quickly that blew up, we created something of a rushed Facebook page to respond, gathered a team of individuals to help out and within less than a week had 7000 members.

**Georgina (the ALLIANCE):**

Oh wow, so you've really expanded recently.

**Rhona Sweeting:**

Absolutely

**Georgina (the ALLIANCE):**

So you've said you've got 7000 members, what has the response from the community been like?

**Rhona Sweeting:**

The response has been astonishing, we have looked for a number of different areas for support. So for example we have a bank of general volunteers who are helping with day to day tasks; delivering shopping, collecting prescriptions. We also have a bank of skilled volunteers who have been helping us to manage and maintain the group. So for example we have content creators who work on creating blogs and animations for our website, we have web creators, we have data managers and administrators who are running dynamic databases of volunteers. More than that within the Facebook group as a whole we have created almost a community within a community, so people use it very much for support as a meeting place. People post

free yoga events, ideas for homeschooling kids, you know nice pictures which have been drawn, so it's become an absolute hub of support in a number of ways.

**Georgina (the ALLIANCE):**

Oh that sounds wonderful, so you've got these volunteers and like you say you've created this community within a community, what other sorts of actions have you seen taking place because of the group?

**Rhona Sweeting:**

What we've also seen, and from I would say probably more of the group management point of view, we have been welcomed by the third sector and by charitable organisations in terms of supporting us. The background of most of the team within the group itself is private sector, I myself am a Project Manager within Renewable Energy in my day to day life. So while we have certain skills we've been looking for support and advice from as I say the third sector and charitable organisations and we've found just enormously helpful conversations cropping up around those; offers of support and advice and learning from both sides.

**Georgina (the ALLIANCE):**

That's so interesting, beyond working with third sector organisations and using your own private sector skills what other advice would you give to people looking to establish their own sort of group like this?

**Rhona Sweeting:**

Define, your remit early on. And I would say very much don't over tax yourself. This is an unprecedented situation and we know that, very few of us alive will ever have faced anything like this before and understandably a lot of people want to get involved and want to help. But you know trying to coordinate all these efforts, as we're seeing you know even for the NHS is a difficult and time consuming exercise. Certainly forming a team is a great way of doing things, so as I say for example we have subject matter experts in data management and administration, we have built this team who can support and network with each other so that not all the work is on one person's shoulders. I'd say very much, manage your workload – my take on it, and again this is from my own experience, is I manage this almost like a commercial project. So we have individuals deployed in certain areas, they're very aware of their remit and then we have a conversation based around that and on the activities that we're undertaking. I think at this stage in time, and particularly for individuals who like myself, who are not from the traditional volunteer community, who perhaps don't have that experience it would be very easy to become very overwhelmed very quickly, but the help and support and expert advice is out there and managing those expectations and managing that remit is an important way to go about things.

**Georgina (the ALLIANCE):**

Thank you so much for that advice, and so at the moment the group is I guess relatively young, but where would you like to see this go in the future – how would you like to it to develop?

**Rhona Sweeting:**

A lot of the feedback that we've had, both from volunteers and from members of the community, is that they have felt empowered by its very existence. I hope that not

too far in the immediate future the immediate need for the group, its raison d'etre, will no longer exist, hopefully. But what I would like to see from a sustainable point of view is that it's carried on and over. A lot of the support that we're offering isn't just collecting shopping for elderly people or those who are ill, it's providing a platform to support the mental health and psychological wellbeing of the community and from that point of view I would like to see that continue. People feel they have a platform where they can connect with others in a similar situation. Going back to the idea of establishing this element of community, one of the areas that we've driven is the creation of street champions. And this is taking the group out on almost a micro level, so we have identified individuals literally at street level and given them tools and resources to support them. Now all they may do is perhaps have a couple of numbers for people in the close next door to them, and it might just be a case of a quick WhatsApp check once a day to make sure everyone's ok, but if we can continue that level of support and empowerment moving forward, that would be my ideal scenario.

**Georgina (the ALLIANCE):**

I mean that all sounds wonderful, and I really hope that that is the way it progresses. Thank you so much for joining us today Rhona and taking the time to speak to us, I've really enjoyed hearing this. It has wonderful seeing how positively the Glasgow Southside has responded through this group to the COVID-19 pandemic and has helped to support people during this difficult time.

And also thank you to our viewers, I hope you've enjoyed this as much as I have and I hope it's provided some useful and interesting information.

ALLIANCE Live will continue to release interviews, webinars and podcasts both on and off the topic of COVID-19. More information regarding these, and the wider work of the ALLIANCE, can be found on our website at [www.alliance-scotland.org.uk](http://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk) . Or follow us on Twitter @AllianceScot .

Have a wonderful day.