

Case Study

March 2021



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with communities
in cumbria

Ulverston Resilience Group



Community and Emergency Support

How Ulverston's Covid-19 response group developed and future-proofed itself to provide community and emergency support for years to come.

Background

At the start of the first Covid-19 national lockdown in March 2020, Ulverston residents were amongst the first in the UK to set up a temporary voluntary support organisation known as the 'Ulverston Self Isolation Group'. The group aimed to assist the elderly and vulnerable in the LA12 area.

Within a year it took on the remit of Ulverston's Emergency Planning Group to form a single entity - Ulverston Resilience Group. It is now becoming a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) so that it can support its community in the longer term as a 'bad weather friend' and a 'good neighbour' rolled into one.

At the beginning, a committee of 11 members was formed, chaired by Caroline Smith-Dance - a local community worker. The group was able to get going quickly by utilising the existing ulverston.com news website and automated phone system. A new Facebook page was created, and 15,000 leaflets were quickly printed and distributed by volunteers to households in the area. Announcements were made in the local press and on the radio.

Almost 400 volunteers were recruited in the first week, and members of the public and local businesses donated money towards buying food and other essential supplies, such as toilet rolls! Within a week, the group had fully established a helpline rota and a call management database, and had taken 500 phone calls. The enthusiasm and goodwill in the town towards the undertaking was quite overwhelming.

The group sent weekly email newsletters to a mailing list of almost 1,000 people, and still does so, now on a fortnightly basis. Over 4,000 people have joined the Facebook group, and it continues to be very active.

The Facebook site is tightly moderated to provide constructive and factual information, and does not allow political posts.

The Project

Initially the group offered shopping services, prescription collections, mail posting, friendship calls and dog walking. Dog walking was quickly dropped due to insurance difficulties. The group worked with local professional caterers to provide food parcels and frozen meals, in many cases delivered to people who were not entitled to access the food bank. It quickly became clear that the lockdown was affecting individuals and whole families who had never previously needed support, and so the group tried to help them as best it could.



Thanks to a generous donation from Cyril Flint Befrienders, the group was able to provide 'random acts of kindness' such as bouquets of flowers or takeaway meals. The group has worked closely with other local groups, such as Ulverston Food Waste Project and Ford Park Community Group, and has helped with the logistics of delivering food parcels, Christmas dinners and managing the stewarding at the local Covid-19 vaccination centre.

Next Steps

Whilst the group was set up as a temporary support organisation for the first Covid-19 lockdown, it has continued to operate non-stop since then, and is now planning its next steps. Working with ACT, the group will shortly relaunch formally as a charity, to become known as 'Ulverston Resilience Group', also taking on the remit of the currently separate Ulverston Emergency Planning Group. The new combined group will continue as before to provide support to those in the community who are in need.

The group also aims to develop a range of new community projects, following the leads of other community groups and emergency planning organisations in Cumbria. Examples of this might include friendship benches, litter picks, gardening, volunteering at community events, and running evacuation centres.

What has been achieved?

As well as supporting hundreds of residents, the group has also helped to create a volunteering ethos in the town. People are happy to 'do their bit' and are experiencing the benefits of volunteering and being part of a team. The volunteers are all given colourful tops (echoing the group's rainbow logo) and through regular online meetings they are meeting new people and developing new relationships. When it is possible to do so, the group look forward to meeting each other in person to build on the existing team spirit.

The Learning

The group set itself up quickly because it had a clear vision of what it wanted to achieve, met frequently on Zoom, made decisions quickly and by calling on their network of friends and contacts they established a committee which had a good cross section of shop owners, councillors, a GP, community workers and IT experience. Having a social media platform and a phone system already in place helped to speed up the process of setting up the group and reaching the community. The group also utilised the local press and radio effectively to promote their work. They have also received tremendous support from others including a grant, donations from local people and businesses, and have worked collaboratively with local organisations.



Want to know more?

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