**Date: 16/12/2020**

**Duration:** 55:48

**Participant:** \*Project Introduction\*

**Participant:** So, is it like a semi-structured interview or-?

**Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, I have a couple, a couple I have many questions but urm, it depends, actually it depends also on how you answer to those questions. Okay so my first question is what is the name of your group?

**Participant:** Okay so, urm, I… I lead three groups, [GROUP NAME 1]. This gave rise to another project called, [GROUP NAME 2], as in the postcode for the east of [CITY NAME 1], and also to another project called [GROUP NAME 3], so this is [GROUP NAME 3]. Okay so [GROUP NAME 1] is very local to [AREA NAME 1] and [AREA NAME 2] those two parts of East [CITY NAME 1], and [GROUP NAME 3] is very local to [AREA NAME 3] and [AREA NAME 4] . Urm, there are also two parts of urr East [CITY NAME 1], and the [AREA NAME 5], as the name implies, is where we meet in the middle, urm so we have volunteers from the [AREA NAME 1] and [AREA NAME 2] group, urr they’re called the neighbourhood support teams, alright, or Nests for short – and they comprise volunteers urm, urr who meet in in our [AREA NAME 5] project which is geographically between our two projects of East [CITY NAME 1] that I just mentioned. So, it’s very, very handy and people can see… that yeah, we’re from [AREA NAME 2] or [AREA NAME 1] but we’re helping at [AREA NAME 5] and then the volunteers from [GROUP NAME 3] from [AREA NAME 3] and [AREA NAME 4] on the other side of East [CITY NAME 1] can see, “yeah, I’m helping out the [AREA NAME 5] project,” and we’re all in Nest together. So, between that, those three groups, it covers the entire area of East [CITY NAME 1], so yeah, three.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and did they start at the same time?

**Participant:** No, I started [GROUP NAME 1] after a conversation with a neighbour, a neighbourhood volunteer. Urm, urr so its very much from the street. That that was launched through Facebook group on the 14th March, urr the beginning of the pandemic. And then urm, [GROUP NAME 3] came out of the Neighbourhood Support Teams. We were running sixteen, seventeen neighbourhood support teams at that point from [GROUP NAME 1], across the whole of [POSTCODE], and it became too much to urr to manage urr for one group. And the demand was really high for food urr in the crisis and so on at that point. It still is, but it was a really steep learning curve. And so, we set up, out of the neighbourhood support teams for [AREA NAME 1], for [AREA NAME 3] and [AREA NAME 4], so out the Nests literally grew, if you’ll forgive the metaphor, like a fledgling group, urm in its own right called [GROUP NAME 3]. And that was launched on the middle of April, okay. So, during the middle of March to mid-April there was really a lot of activity, there has been ever since but that was extremely busy we were working like sixteen hours a day and it was, it was a pretty scary time.

And then urr, [GROUP NAME 2] was set up, urm, I think… in September, I’ll have to check that, but I think that’s when the conversation I had with the [AREA NAME 1] Chapel about that time. Urm, because we needed, I was, I was using like my garage at the back of my house as a depot for the food. And its not the, you know, it’s not the safest or the most hygienic although we were keeping everything, you know, as clean and everything as we could, and sterilizing and wearing gloves and masks and everything. We had teams of volunteers packing boxes inn the back of my house, urm socially distanced – but that couldn’t go on. So, we were lucky enough to get a big space in the [AREA NAME 1] Chapel, urm down the road from me. So, and we’ve bene there since them. But we’re also hoping to go into new premises as well.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and what was the aim of the group when it started?

**Participant:** So, the aim of [GROUP NAME 1], was to support those in most need in [AREA NAME 1], [AREA NAME 2] and the rest of [POSTCODE] district, urm who were vulnerable, elderly or vulnerable was the kind of target group we were looking at at the time. Because they’re the ones who were coming to us on the street and we knew about who were really struggling. Who were shielding, self-isolating, urm, their payments, pensions, all that, it was all stopping and they were really afraid, and they had no food and the anxiety levels were really going up and they were feeling very socially isolated? And they weren’t getting the information, so its to try and inform what is COVID, what is going on, because they’re not online, they’re not, you know, the TV goes too fast for a lot of people. Urm so we, so that was the aim was to support them through food, through medicines, through information and advice and signpost them to other agencies. And that, that urr target group if you like has grown since so now our aims are broadly to meet the needs of those people in crisis. Urr whoever they are in urm the East of [CITY NAME 1], [POSTCODE] postcode. Urr so that is broadly the aims of all three of those groups, but each of them has a specific remit.

**Interviewer:** So, has anything changed since it started?

**Participant:** Yes, I mean it’s, urm, it’s been clearer what the infrastructure is in terms of urm… getting food to people, the council and the infrastructure of public health was, urm they did their best but they were quite slow to respond because they’re quite large unwieldy structure with lots of silos an stuff. Whereas we were very, we’ve always a responded within twenty-four hours and we continue to do that, but we were able to, urm, we’ve developed those partnerships with the council systems and public health better, urm as they’ve developed their side, so that’s changed.

But also, urm, the demand has changed in the sense that people have been able to go back to work a lot more, urm, during the second wave, although still with difficulties especially with children and self-isolating and school, so they have to stay at home and then people can’t get out to work. So, some of the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic has still been there, but people are still generally managed to get out – they’re slightly less afraid, some people are still very afraid, but you know few people were really, really afraid and anxious and worried about the virus. So, the needs of people have changed. Urm, urr there’ve been people with different needs than we’ve now found. Lots of people have gone back to work so they’re more like, looking after themselves between. But we’ve also found people who’ve always been in poverty, who’ve always had these needs who’ve never been able to get to work through no fault of their own, and their situations been made a lot worse by the pandemic.

And that, that has changed, as a negative change, so the impact of the virus has grown bigger on the most needy in the community and that’s something that hasn’t really been picked up by the state, or, you know, by the media who were thinking, “oh you know, the first waves gone so its all happy days, back to work.” But there’s been this hidden sector of the community, what I call hidden households, who have become more and more needy and more difficult to find, actually. So, we’ve had to respond to that need, that’s been a really difficult thing for us to do. Because we’re all, we’re all kind of professionals in our day job, I [DESCRIPTION OF OCCUPATION 1], we’ve got other people who are doing urm… you know lots of different, public health, or different jobs in their daytime, so we’re all kind of widely professionals, but we’re not specialists in, I don’t think anybody is, in you know, COVID related poverty and social exclusion. Urm, and those wider needs have come to fore, whereas before it was mainly just hunger and food and also some emergency medicines delivery, working with the local chemists who couldn’t cope. Urm, particularly people self-isolating now its much bigger the needs, a lot more to do with anxiety, depression, mental health issues, domestic abuse, all the kinds of social care issues which the pandemic has made a lot worse. We’re having to help people find help. So, sign posting and try to act as a bridge with the specialist people. So it’s a broader, our change there has been, of our remit, has become broader.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so what is the situation with the group at the moment, so you are still providing help?

**Participant:** [INTERVIEWER NAME], I’m having trouble hearing you? Urm I’ve got my volume turned up; I don’t know if maybe there’s a way…

**Interviewer:** Okay, what is the situation with the group?

**Participant:** What’s the situation?

**Interviewer:** At the moment? Yes. What are you doing?

**Participant:** How is the group doing?... what the volunteers or the whole, just the whole situation, yeah?

**Interviewer:** Yes, at this moment.

**Participant:** The whole situation. Urm… urr… we’re, we’re tired. We’re pretty tired at this stage, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Urm, we’ve got fewer volunteers because people are having to self-isolate a lot more because of their children isolating from school. Urr, we got people who have gone back to work so we’re having to kind of cover more need with fewer people. And urm, yeah, I mean it’s good that we’ve got the depot now, the chapel for food and we’ve got kind of more organised in terms of, we know where our food’s coming from and there’s no shortage of food, there is so much food out there, and that’s not an issue. We also know a bit more about need and a lot more about who the people are. So, we’ve got like a map of all the people we help, and we’ve got a system where people and refer through. So, our infrastructure is pretty good, our organisation. It’s just trying to find hours in the day to run that and we need more, more help. Urm, but the good news is, one of the groups [GROUP NAME 3], we’ve got some funding in now through [ORGANISATION NAME 1], [ORGANISATION NAME 1], so we can employ urm, a project manager and voluntary coordinator and also a pantry manager, so this, this project will be developing quite substantially during the next six months, urm, in [GROUP NAME 3]. So that part of the Eastern [CITY NAME 1], [AREA NAME 4] and [AREA NAME 3]. But also, available for other parts of East [CITY NAME 1], depending on need we can, we can make provision. We’re not going to close the door to people in most need. So, so, although there’s like the impact of the whole pandemic with no breaks has been really pretty harsh, urm… we’re also getting now the signs of support and, and funding and infrastructure and physical space to be able to develop and sustain ourselves. Urm, that’s, that’s the hope.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Have you had any previous experience of coordinating groups like this one?

**Participant:** Yes, I have, I’ve worked in community action since 1980, so, you know, forty, thirty to forty years. Urm… so when I was still a student, you know, I was coordinating a group. It’s mainly been with young people urm… so I’ve got, I’ve got a lot of these skills, it doesn’t get any easier, I’ve got to say. But it’s been a learning curve for us in terms of food provision, so I was coordinating a community garden project before this for a couple of years. Urr, urr which is a really important part of the food provision cycle, so I’m glad now [CITY NAME 1] is beginning to pick up on community gardens, allotments, different things like that. Urm, so that, that’s been a recent example which I, I only finished last year I think, so I was able to draw on that, and also quite a few of the contacts in the food world urm, to be able to so that. But I didn’t come into it lightly, I knew it was going to be, I knew it was going to be tricky, its certainly the hardest project I’ve ever done.

**Interviewer:** Yeah? Okay, so why did you get involved?

**Participant:** Urm, I, I moved to East [CITY NAME 1], to [AREA NAME 1] five years ago and I don’t, you know, it’s a poor part of town, generally, there’s a side of [AREA NAME 1] that’s pretty affluent now, I’ve got to say, through people, tradesmen have made their money and so on, build their nice house. But generally, I’d say it’s quite a poor place. But the people are really rich in spirit and community spirit. So, my neighbours in the wider sense, I know quite a few. And they, they stop you in the street, through this other volunteer that I mentioned, neighbourhood volunteer, you know, I heard through him that people are very struggling. And he just saw it, so something had to be done. That’s it.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And what is your role in the group?

**Participant:** What’s my?

**Interviewer:** Role. What do you do in the group?

**Participant:** Okay, so I’ve got like this kind of three headed role at the moment, which is to, to coordinate [GROUP NAME 1], urm, also to lead the [GROUP NAME 2] project, the newest one, urm, and to… urm, lead the voluntary action for [GROUP NAME 3] – [GROUP NAME 3] but I’m also on the steering group for that. So, urm, yeah, my roles were first [GROUP NAME 1], second [GROUP NAME 3] was born, and third [GROUP NAME 2].

**Interviewer:** Okay, and how does the activity that you do in the group relates to other parts of your life?

**Participant:** How does it relate to other parts?

**Interviewer:** Yes, of your life?

**Participant:** Yeah, urr it’s a good question. I mean it’s, its urm… although my family have been helpful and involved it’s like any kind of job in that way that we try and make time for family time. Urr there’s been not a lot of that, I’m afraid, and not a lot of me time. Urm, so I’ve been careful to try and keep that separate. And in the first wave of the pandemic, it was really difficult, I mean it was just, we were just working ridiculous hours, seven days a week. Urm, but then we had a break, I saw we – me and the other volunteers – urm, me in particular I guess because it was just trying to recruit all the volunteers. We had seventy or eighty on our books in the end, I think. Amazing people, just local neighbours, people giving time. Urm, and then… yeah, I made sure we had a break in the summer as a family and we went away and that was really helpful for a week or ten days or something. Urm but otherwise it is, its important for us as a family, we are part of the local church, urm… you know… they, they, the rest of my family care, we’re sort of caring, socially conscious people. Urm…and so kind of fits in our approach as a family. Urm… urr and in terms of kind of my relationship with the neighbourhood and the community, it maps onto that really well. Its urr, its really enriched and urr, yeah, it amazes me everyday actually, how good people are. Urm…in that sense, in terms of my own kind of life if you like, as a member of the community, it’s been pretty enriching there and making lots of new contacts. Urm, its also helping… urm, and I need to know this, I need to remember this, this motivates me a lot, like any volunteer, it’s important to know what motivates you. So, my professional career, you know my life in community projects, this is another one and it’s becoming more and more kind of professional as the funding comes in. So… urm, it’s, it’s becoming part of, like as a paid job, you know, in the future.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and what kind of things urr did the group does?

**Participant:** What kind of things…?

**Interviewer:** Yeah, you do.

**Participant:** What, day to day activities?

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Participant:** Okay. So, the [AREA NAME 1] group, so [GROUP NAME 1], we, we… urm, have always responded to referrals that have come in through our helpline or through a range of different place, even the council and social care send people to us now. Urm we can, because we can respond to their needs I terms of food, we can buy food for them through the grants we have, we can top up their electricity and gas, we can buy furniture for them and kid’s clothes, shoes. You know all the stuff that is just not possible for people where their benefits have been messed around because of the pandemic and they’re just not getting the money in, so they just can’t cope. And the [GROUP NAME 3], [GROUP NAME 3], is very similar. Urm, so we have volunteer teams these Nests, that I told you about, the Neighbourhood Support Teams. Urm we, we then notified them on the WhatsApp groups that we had, see who’s available for helping buy shopping or taking you know, urm I don’t know, responding to what we call crisis response and that happens within twenty-four hours.

And then we have some signposting so three or four of us are more specialists in knowing about other agencies and filling in referral forms for things like tenancy support through the council or, fuel vouchers through another voluntary organisation called [ORGANISATION NAME 2] in the west of [CITY NAME 1], they’re in charge of statutory funding on vouchers for gas and electric, so we administer that now. So there’s a certain mount of filling in forms and referring people. Urm we put out appeals through our social media, so I’ve got more people, its not just me there are two or three others that are going that which is great. Urm, and a big bit of what we do is urm recycle food waste. So, food waste that is safe so just gone best before, so best before is yesterday we know its good and safe usually for a couple of days, obviously we have common sense if it doesn’t look right, we don’t use it. Urm and then also urm… fresh food that comes in that is safe, so urm, urm if any meat based or fish-based projects come in, we freeze that automatically and then we give that. So, it’s all complies with food safety, we’re in touch with food safety, they know about or stuff. Our risk assessments and health and safety processes that we use day to day are all compliant and COVID, and COVID safe.

So we meet at [GROUP NAME 2] at [AREA NAME 1] chapel on a Wednesday morning, like we did this morning, and we will giver food out to those who come, but also if it’s particularly filthy weather like this morning and the kids are at home and whatever and we’ve got quite a lot of shopping to give them, like food groceries, this is all donated food, this has all come from supermarkets, we mainly use Sainsburys, Morrison’s and Tesco, they give us food waste that would otherwise be thrown in the bin. Urm a shocking amount, I mean its huge the amount of food, we can get rid of any amount of food -that’s no problem, at the moment. Because we feed maybe about eight or nine families and individuals on Wednesday morning, urm who have got ongoing problems like – we rank, rate people so it’s like green, amber or red level of need. So, these will be like the red level need people. And then on Saturdays urm, there’s about double that amount that we help with food for the week over in [AREA NAME 3] and [AREA NAME 4]. Urr with our team from [GROUP NAME 3], so volunteers come, and they pack up the bags and urm, I’m coordination I’ve got my coordinator now on the team at [AREA NAME 3] and [AREA NAME 4] in [GROUP NAME 3] who make sure that everybody knows who to give food to and what they need and so on. Urm, so that’s that other level of food distribution that happens on a Wednesday and Saturday mornings.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and how many people are in the group?

**Participant:** How many people int eh group? Volunteers, yeah?

**Interviewer:** Volunteers and active help.

**Participant:** At the moment we’ve got about twenty in [GROUP NAME 1], and twenty active in [GROUP NAME 3], and they are from… the volunteers for [GROUP NAME 2]. So, from each of those two teams the [GROUP NAME 2] - the [GROUP NAME 2] activity from, from the chapel, which is mainly that Wednesday and Saturday morning action, plus also food drives where we go around the community once a month and pick-up donated food. Urm, so about forty active all together but through, through the pandemic we’ve had somewhere, I think its near a hundred people on our, on our register of volunteers. Many of those have gone back to work now.

**Interviewer:** And in terms of resources?

**Participant:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** What resources do you have? You mentioned a couple of funds, anything else?

**Participant:** A couple of?

**Interviewer:** Funds, do you have some funds?

**Participant:** A couple of funds yeah, so we’ve had, we’ve had, in terms of funding we’ve had the [ORGANISATION NAME 3], which is a big lottery funded urm, urm group in urm… in [AREA NAME 3] who have funded us for emergency food for [AREA NAME 3] and [AREA NAME 4] area. Urm… so we’re able to buy food for those two districts, up to about £80 for each family. Urm so they can free stuff and that’s okay for them for a couple of weeks. And then we’ve had one or two other funds in, I think through the community foundation. Urm, and… urm some other small grants. We, we have been a belt to sue those for Crisis response for other parts of urm East [CITY NAME 1]. We had grant of £5000 from a private sector as well through [COMPANY NAME]. And now we’ve quite a size, you know, a much bigger grant from the [ORGANISATION NAME 1] for [GROUP NAME 3] which will also help us with the crisis response for the whole of East [CITY NAME 1] as well.

Urm, but mainly it’s been peoples time, you know, volunteer effort, people’s cars, we can now pay for some fuel, there’s been a lot of driving round, a lot of time. The space that we’ve been given by [AREA NAME 1] chapel has been invaluable and I’m hoping we’re going to be able to move into a local community centre and lease that as well. Urr that’s the plan for the new year. Urr - you know, those are the basic resources as well as the food that we get given.

**Interviewer:** And how about particular skills that people in the group have?

**Participant:** Urm the people’s skills are… very varied. I mean, it seems that most people have got either day jobs or recently retired from day, you know form jobs with people, so people work. So, they have they have people skills through having been working with NHS, having been working in social care, having been working in, urm housing, different things like that. So, those people skills are there, so knowledge of the social care sector. Urm my own skills I’ve mentioned, I’m from a community and youth background. Urm… urm, so you know, I’ve been active, very experiences in social action for a long time. Urm and then, so also in terms of my skills and one or two others for managing volunteers. So, the coordinators, these two coordinators as we call them, for they coordinate the neighbourhood support teams, they have they’ve already got those people skills, but they’ve been learning, very steep learning curve on how to coordinate and manage volunteers.

Urm… urr and then in terms of skills for food provision, we’ve had to really just… learn it through common sense, through staying safe, through knowing the regulations. Urm through learning form other, other pantries and food provision people around East [CITY NAME 1] and the east of [CITY NAME 1]. So, there’s been lots of networking and those networking skills have been very important. But yeah, its all new to everybody, this who pandemic, so we’ve had to just really… you know be, be level-headed and sensible and careful and just try and learn from each other the best we can.

**Interviewer:** So, you just mentioned network with to the groups, so how is the relationship with other groups?

**Participant:** Yeah, that’s been really important, I mean, I’m a networker, I’ve set up and run… international, national and local networks for many years. Urm and… I know the value and the importance, especially during an emergency like this, we, we have to work together, so I networked with the council from the word go, with other groups, including [AREA NAME 1] chapel where we’re based now, and it was a slow start, you know. Some people are less into working together and networking, and they just kind of what to do their own thing. And that’s fine, and they realise well actually, you know we do need to partner up and work together. So, the relationships are pretty good now, both within the third centre so other voluntary groups and we’re beginning to support others to come through. Like there’s a new group in the west of [CITY NAME 1] called [ORGANISATION NAME 4] and the girl [NAME OF COORDINATOR] who runs that she’s really learning fast every day. You know she’s been overwhelmed and I’m having to support her with what we’ve learnt through this. Urm and then in the public sector, linking with the council, and public health. We were donating a lot to the [HOSPITAL NAME] as well, because we know there were people from East [CITY NAME 1] and other, elsewhere in [CITY NAME 1], really sick people who needed extra food and good stuff that people couldn’t bring in. Because of because of the restrictions, you know they weren’t getting any visitors and stuff so, we’ve been able to give them toiletries and different treats as well. So, we’ve networked with the public sector through the public health [COUNTRY NAME 1], through the local council, through other, large organisations including through this project that are learning from us, who want to find out from us what’s going on and how we can work together.

And then in the private sector as well we’re worked, we’ve networked well with Sainsburys, urm Sainsburys and Morrison’s their community links particularly, and then also, to a certain extent with Tesco as well. But also, what’s crucial going back to the kind of third sector partnerships, is with other pantries other food providers, not just the wone that I mentioned that we’re helping to start up now, urm called [ORGANISATION NAME 4]. But also, with more established urm, they’ve got funding in quicker they wanted to do down kind of alternative retail provision kind of things. So, the national pantry network franchise. Urm there’s an example of that in [AREA NAME 2], all of that in the East of [CITY NAME 1]. That they’ve set up an amazing project there which we’re learning for, because we may as well go down the pantry franchise route in the new year, through [GROUP NAME 3].

And then other, any other food providers through, through [NAME OF PARTNERSHIP], through at initiative that you know about, we’re networking there, especially to learn from there and also to share our wisdom, I guess.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Urm, and the, how is the relationship with the local council?

**Participant:** The urm, it’s, it’s okay. I mean we, we have been promoting their advice lines since the word go, on all of our leaflets, all our publicity, we know we can’t do, urr specialist stuff around money and housing and things the council does. So, we’ve been, from our side, kind of all we can to tell people in the street and those people who are kind of disconnected from the state. You know, social exclusion – especially during this pandemic has really cut people off from the state, and that’s how they feel. So, we’ve been kind of trying to reconnect people. Telling them, “you know, there’s a phone number you can phone,” and so on. And the council have appreciated that. We, it’s been difficult sometimes to, urm, communicate the needs so, for systems that are in place that… you know, they eventually ended up relaxing because the pandemic. So, for example you could only get three food vouchers for six months normally, that’s been relaxed, but all the council staff knew that. So, that’s just one example. But there’ve been quite a few situations where it’s been quite difficult to get help to the neediest. It’s taken months to get kind of council services that they’ve needed. Because the council staff on their side, they’ve had their pressures, but they’re kind of, like most big councils, their infrastructure, it’s been difficult for that to adapt to a COVID emergency. So, for them to respond to a much bigger need and different needs more quickly, with fewer staff or different staff have not been employed quickly enough or whatever. Or all of them working from home. So, they’ve had their pressures just as we’ve had ours from our side. But I think through the councils [unclear 30:48] group although I haven’t had time to go to go to the Zoom meetings every Friday, you know, we have networked as best we can. Urm, and you know the council, like I say, they now refer to people to us as well, as to other housing associations. So yeah, you know, it’s still a long way to go and I’m not sure we’re even going to be like a partnership as such. But we kind of understand each other better and we can support each other to a certain extent, pretty well.

**Interviewer:** And has the group tied to get official recognition, for example becoming a charity or a company?

**Participant:** Sorry?

**Interviewer:** If you through about getting official recognition. For example, becoming a charity or a company.

**Participant:** Yeah, okay. Urm I mean we, the, the great thing urm about bringing in, urm or starting up [GROUP NAME 3] and [POSTCODE], [GROUP NAME 2] is [GROUP NAME 1] is still and never was constituted formally. It wasn’t the aim, the aim was to bring, you know, neighbours together and to give help to people who need it. But we did need, we needed to raise money, urm to have that kind of yeah resource. So that was one of the things we partnered up with [NAME OF CHURCH], for, this is for [GROUP NAME 3] yeah, in the middle of April. Urr [NAME OF CHURCH] based in [AREA NAME 4] are aa CIO, a charitable incorporated organisation. So, they can raise money, urr and that’s how they’ve gone, you know they’ve managed to raise some grant money so we can use that for crisis support across through our group. And also, [GROUP NAME 2], I believe the [AREA NAME 1] chapel can also raise money as well, I’m not sure exactly about their incorporation status or whatever. But certainly, through [NAME OF CHURCH], partnering with them, partnering with [NAME OF SCHOOL], so the professionalism through them there. And you know… they’re kind of formalised professional status as a very large school and college. So those are the two main partners in [GROUP NAME 3]. We’ve got a [GROUP NAME 1] very much monitoring neighbourhood level. We’ve then got [NAME OF CHURCH] as as CIO and we’ve then got [NAME OF SCHOOL] as, you know, kind of a professional overseer, particularly around safe – safeguarding, so they act as the lead on that. So, that’s kind of given us what we need in terms of charitable status in the broader sense. But also, specifically for raising funds through the CIO status of [NAME OF CHURCH].

However, \*coughs\* excuse me. We maybe urm... we may be going down that road for [GROUP NAME 3] I particular to become its own… yeah. Its own charitable, I don’t know about a registered charity, but certainly to have… urr CIC or CIO status.

**Interviewer:** You think it will help. Urm, and how did you get volunteers involved?

**Participant:** Okay so, urm… through word of mouth with [GROUP NAME 1], through posting leaflets through the door, which was to help people, but some people said, because we had like my phone number on it – they’d come back and say, “we don’t need help, but we can give help.” Okay, because of the lockdown as well, we had, we were allowed in pairs to go out at a social distance and also post leaflets through the door, as long as the paper was clean, all the rest of it. Back in the day, we didn’t know much about the virus on surfaces, so we did that. So, we did it through leafletting. We did it through… urm the social media groups, so particularly the Facebook group for [GROUP NAME 1]. Got a lot of volunteers through there. And also, to a certain extent we’ve had some through from [NAME OF COUNCIL INITIATIVE], through the council run urm [NAME OF COUNCIL INITIATIVE]. Urm yeah and then people who just know people, through that. Like now we’ve got couple who have started this week who from being friends with volunteers already giving their time.

**Interviewer:** Okay, is the group part of any national network?

**Participant:** I’m sorry [INTERVIEWER NAME].

**Interviewer:** You have to go? Oh, sorry.

**Participant:** Can you say it again?

**Interviewer:** If the group is part of a national network?

**Participant:** Urm, no, not as such, urm… no. I mean food, [NAME OF PARTNERSHIP] I know is linked to different projects nationally, I think we’re a member of [NAME OF PARTNERSHIP], you know, if whatever, they’re doing in terms of membership. Urm, urr…. But not… not otherwise really. I mean I suppose the church, the churches we work with, particularly [NAME OF CHURCH] will be part of a wider national network of churches maybe. But, but not directly no.

**Interviewer:** And where I’d you find people that needed help? How did you find them?

**Participant:** When did we find them?

**Interviewer:** How? How did you find them?

**Participant:** How.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Participant:** Okay, so partly through the leafletting that I mentioned. So, we put reach out coupons like urm, slips with urm… you know, “we’re here to help, I’m your neighbour, you put your name and your telephone number and then people call you.” And then that gets put into our kind of database and then the whole referral system then goes into, into work. We’ve had people message our Facebook group, we also managed to have our helpline, like an automated answerphone service set up in the school that we partner with, [NAME OF SCHOOL] and that goes automatically onto an e-mail system, which is great. Urm so we haven’t had people have to man the phones twenty-four seven, you know, there’s like a a answering service that’s there. And then we call them back and help them that that way. There’s been people referred to us from lots of different agencies, housing associations, urm council, social care, other charities, we had [NAME OF CHARITY] sent one of two people to us in the early days. Urm, and then word got around. Urm, so yeah, various different agencies as well. So, those three different things. One is reaching out to neighbours, second is social media, and third through referrals. And I guess another really important thing is just, our neighbour – our volunteers you know, in their neighbourhood they hear people, and neighbours refer neighbours. And that’s a way that I’m hoping this thing will sustain itself going forward. It’s not like in an official professionalised referral system, its neighbourly. It’s a neighbourhood project and its from neighbour to neighbour.

**Interviewer:** Okay, you talk a bit about your motivations, urm in your position that are the motivations of other active participants?

**Participant:** The active participants in our group, yeah?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Participant:** Urm it’s a very good question it’s, we, really important that we try to recruit, manage volunteers that they know what motivates them, its so important. Yeah, people say they want to help, but then you get to know them, and every often there may be a more broadly spiritual motivation, so there may be other, they may be members of faith groups, urm Christian or other. Or they may have a sort of more broadly spiritual, what I would call a whole human approach to life. Urm, you know, that’s there… that’s, that’s how they are, you know as people, they are, they are not just helpful but people who are good neighbours, people who care about the community, people who are socially conscious, so that kind of broader monitoring that’s there, so just naturally kind people. So, you know, urm… that kind of personal side of people, that kindness, generosity, care, you know, responding to an emergency, you know stepping up to the crisis that COVID has, you know, has presented us with in East [CITY NAME 1]. And you know being part of the community, being part of East [CITY NAME 1], being part of [AREA NAME 4] and [AREA NAME 3], and it’s very different to people who are part of [AREA NAME 1], each neighbourhood has got its own identity. So, so the, the sense of belonging to a neighbourhood has had motivate people to look after their kin.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and how about problems that you have encountered in the group. For example, you already mentioned that, urr that it meant a lot of time and effort, right? For you and also for the others? Urr can you tell me a little bit more about that, even emotional support, how was it?

**Participant:** Urm, did you mention the word conflict to start with in your first question?

**Interviewer:** Problems?

**Participant:** Any problems, yeah, sorry, so yes, the pressure on all of us has been really a lot but then you, when you realise what motivates you, like I said, for myself it enriches them and inspires them, it gives them a bit of extra energy to go the extra mile. Urr they realise what, when people, like the family today what I’ve just come from, you know, the children are not, you now, they haven’t got much to wear or some of them are not wearing anything because their clothes are, they only have one set of clothes so they’re in the wash. But we can see that they’re well fed, they say thank you and they mean it. And they’re really appreciative, and they’re living in quite a significant situation of poverty, however, which is crazy in the twenty-first century, but that is how it is. Urm, however, you know, knowing your making, you’re making that difference, urm, has really kept a lot of my volunteers and myself going. So that’s the kind of common bond we see, if we start thinking about people we help and not just about ourselves. Although of course I try and make sure we all look after each other as a team. But I think working together as a team has been what overcomes different issues.

We’ve got different values a lot of us, we see things differently, we’ve got different views on this whole kind of, you know, public health, urm, regulations and you know, whether we should be socially distant or isolating, whatever, whatever. You know so in terms of basic health and safety guidance and such like, it’s been… there’ve been one or two issues there but people, you know, people realise urm when… when you - you know, I’m talking about people that we work with in the group. When we raised, or I raised awareness and educate them on why this is that we have to be careful, urm, then people, you know, realise. So, it’s been, like I say a lot of urm challenges and tensions about learning ourselves about this pandemic, and how we need to be safe and work safely.

Urm, but also, emotionally safely and healthily for ourselves so we don’t burn out, get exhausted. So, we’re kind of going back into that now, as I say as we’re going back into winter. And I have to be careful about that and review things again. But certainly, our of the first wave an coming through the second, it worked really well that we were becoming more kind of strict about, you know, only working from ten a.m. to six p.m. Urm, not answering calls in the middle of the night, you know things like that, having to be quite firm with people that we’ve helped and we’ve explained to them that we can only provide so much, you know sort of short time crisis support. And being really straight with people we’ve helped has helped us a s a team. Urm, because you know… nerves, tempers, I don’t know tempers, but certainly emotions get frayed, our energy gets frayed where we are trying to do too much for too many people.

Urm so that, that’s helped with those challenges, those emotional challenges, just, just sheer overwork, and also trying to you know make time for your own family life, your professional life, you know your income and your job, as well as trying to keep reaching out to people in the community and meet that need. All of that has been, you know, really, really difficult.

**Interviewer:** And what kind of things have you done that helped the group keep going?

**Participant:** Urm so apart from what I was saying about the motivation of, yeah, identifying, just recognising how great it is that people have been – how we’ve made a difference, they’ve shown really appreciation, we’ve seen how people have come out crisis and have changed from people in need to people with assets. Even assets for the community, people who now want to come back and volunteer. You know, these are people that we found in a really, really bad way to start with, and now they’ve picked themselves up through our help and through the help of other agencies, and now they want to give back and be part of the… community as active volunteers. It’s a wonderful thing, and that that that really keeps people going in the team. Urm just to kind of see how, yeah, the people we’ve been helping have come back in to be active members of the community and neighbours themselves.

Urm we do meet, not enough I think, because the restrictions, but we do have some Zoom meetings, we need to have more really, to make more time for that as a volunteer team just to, but we, we try and make time, I don’t know on a Wednesday and Saturday morning, the teams like social distant, just to shat with each other a bit, even though we’re all really busy. You know physically making time, now that we can, to be within a space socially distant to pack food boxes and bags but communicate as well. Atha’s been really important to be together as a human team. Urm and, yeah, just to keep checking on each other. Yeah, especially those where you literally have to say, “no,” to, because they will never say no, they will always say yes to taking on more work. So, you have to be strict.

**Interviewer:** And were any of this strategic?

**Participant:** Urm… do you mean strategic in terms of dealing with the problems in the group or in terms of the whole organisations?

**Interviewer:** The whole organisation.

**Participant:** Yeah. It’s an - Strategy’s as funny word. You know somebody in the community development foundation, for one of the first projects I ever did… urr he said to me, “you know [INTERVIEWEE NAME], you can never be too strategic, and this, or it doesn’t help to be too strategic in this kind of work,” and I didn’t really get what he meant until years later when urr…. We, we can strategize and plan and have like big operational plans and have some kind of policy for this, but especially in a a pandemic like this, you get so many unknown quantities and unknown needs, different situations people coming – and you realise that actually, your strategy is your neighbourliness, your strategy is you’re your being human. Urr… yeah, your strategy is okay, you need to find where your food and supplies are coming from to give to people. Your strategy is you’ve got to have some systems in place and be able to reach out to people. But you keep it simple, you start getting too strategic and kind of, you know lots of operational plans and you know, almost like politically strategized with a small ‘P’ like a lot of these big charities, it, it, it becomes too ridged. You don’t, you don’t urm… so if you like there’s some kind of like top-down resources, money, some wisdom and kind of organisation in terms of the steering group we have for [GROUP NAME 3] and there’s only three people on that with us, there’s me and [NAME OF CHURCH] and [NAME OF SCHO, the deputy head teacher there. But you are always making space for the ground, the neighbours, the ground to come up. So, for that bottom up urm, breathing growth development, people to come to you. And you meet in the middle, and that’s where the magic happens. Does that makes sense? You know if there’s a strategy, it’s that kind of vision as well that me and others I work with now kind of share where we’re trying to kind of, not be too top down, but not be completely bottom up with now support or guidance for people and just expecting them to kind of sort themselves out. That doesn’t happen either. So, you know the two have to met together and in the middle there there’s a kind of… response to the crisis but also where this kind of, becomes a community development project that sustains itself going forward.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so I know that you need to go, but I just have three more questions, do you want to continue, it will be okay?

**Participant:** Urm, yeah if we can try and do it in ten minutes, that would be great.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so have people drop out of your group?

**Participant:** Yeah so, we’ve had quite a few people, there’s, I suppose about two thirds of them have had to go back to work or they’ve only been out, you know, their situation changes. We’ve had fewer people, some people have become sick, some people, a lot, a lot of the people have become social isolated, urm sorry, self-isolating because of the, because of the pandemic. So, like, three people who would be helping today couldn’t because of that, they have to isolate at home. So, people come and go from the group and then some have just left completely because they’ve either had to relocate or mostly because they’ve had to go back to full time work.

**Interviewer:** Okay, urm, and how about lessons, what kind of thing have you learned from coordinating this group?

**Participant:** Urm… yeah, my books always open you know… I… I’ve learnt a lot from the people that we help, how they can keep going and survive and be resilient and still keep going, despite everything being the worst. So… you know I learnt from people how to thrive as a person, I learnt from the neediest. And I learn from people that I work with day to day their stories and where they’re coming from, you know, and why they help us. and maybe little tricks of the trade around food provision, organisation, logistics. Urm… I think in terms of responding to a crisis I’ve learnt an awful lot. I mean a lot of the anti-poverty work I’ve done over the years has been more kind of strategic has been more policy driven, has been more urm… yeah, just trying to combat poverty and social exclusion that’s there, and sadly will probably always be there. But this pandemic has kind of put another layer on that of crisis where, its been a very… bit learning curve for all of us to try an deal with what I’ve termed, I guess other people have found this as well, but the COVID combination is what I call it. Its that combination of all of those indexes and multiple deprivation together. You know like the health obviously, you know, sometimes fatal, we’ve had to deal with, you know, cases where people have died, different things, urm, bereavement all of those different stuff around health. You know economic wellbeing, people whose jobs have stopped or their income streams or their benefits have stopped. You know the housing issues that they already had, their mental health, there other issue as well. As well as their sense of community, safely, you know, feeling a lot less safe. And in fact, the streets have been a lot less safe because there’s been less policing, people have been a lot more stressed, there’s been a bit more crime going on. You know all of that, urm, its urr, that whole combination of things as well as, as well as you know, the food poverty side of stuff. Which we know is linked to income deprivation, though not entirely. Its, yeah, learning how somehow to work, to work together as a team but also linking with other agencies to get your head around the need and try and feel that there is some kind of holistic response to that. Urr in the small way that we do it. That’s been, there’s no kind of system as such, that puts that in place that response, but it’s knowing that yeah, that family’s okay now for for a while at least. All of those complex needs its very difficult to get your head around and to be in their shoes. So that, you know I always… I always urr, that’s been an ongoing learning thing for me and for others in our team, definitely.

**Interviewer:** Okay, urm, how do you see the future, the future of this group?

**Participant:** So, I think [GROUP NAME 1] was always support to be finite and it was only really supposed to help in that sort of main first wave, even though we thought there might be worse. But that’s all we can do it kept going through the second wave, I don’t think it will keep going through the third wave, there’s just not enough people to run it and I’ve got my hands full now with [GROUP NAME 3] now that we’ve got more funding in and we need to recruit staff and so on. So that will probably stop in the new year or spring, but [GROUP NAME 2] that was born out of that, is still based in [AREA NAME 1] and [AREA NAME 2], so that will still keep going, if we can find volunteers to run it.

Then [GROUP NAME 3] will develop I hope longer term, and maybe change from [GROUP NAME 3], to [NEW NAME]. Urm, there are one or two other umbrella groups kind of nearby that together [unclear 53:56] people like that, you know that are also involved in community action, action across [AREA NAME 3] and [AREA NAME 4], so we need to be careful how do we sit with that, and whats our remit and whats our identity, but it will always be something, I think, around crisis response, urm but but but more. So that recovery element, making people urm… enabling people, empowering them to become resilient, crisis resilient you might use that phrase, so that’s where [GROUP NAME 3] is going urm for [AREA NAME 3] and [AREA NAME 4], but also, you know, also including other parts of [POSTCODE], so we’ve got funding now for six months from now and urm, yeah, it, it’s possible that, that can be self-sustaining in the future.

**Interviewer:** And you, you plan to keep engaged?

**Participant:** Yeah, yeah.

**[Debriefing]**

**[End of Interview]**