**Date: 17/11/2020**

**Duration:** 48:49

**Interviewer:** \*Project introduction\*

Okay, so my first question is what is the name of your group?

**Participant:** It’s [GROUP NAME].

**Interviewer:** Okay, and when did the group start?

**Participant:** It was about all together about seven years ago I believe, somewhere around that. Because it was not established for COVID, it was already in place.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so, how did you start to – so you start to do activities relate to COIVD when?

**Participant:** No, no, no.

**Interviewer:** No.

**Participant:** That’s why I think it’s important you understand what we do and then –

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** We started, as I say, probably about seven years ago, I wasn’t in the group at that time, but I am now and have been for about five years. It weas established because there was one particular lady in the village who needed a lot of help. And she sparked the interest in establishing a [NAME OF TYPE OF GROUP].

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** So, a committee was formed, urm recognised as part of the [NAME OF NETWORK OF LOCAL CHARITIES], so we’re a charity, affiliated to a charity. Urm, and we raised funds to start the process, things for – not too many expenses but things like insurance, you ended to have insurance, you need to have a mobile phone and occasionally there are things that you have to buy - so fundraiser. So, it was well established as a support to the community that we were in before COVID came along. And we were quite active, urm, right up until about a year before COVID when unfortunately the lady who started it and was one of the people who used to use us a lot, unfortunately other elderly people sort of didn’t need the service, either hospitalised in homes, or passed away. Urm, at the time of COVID we were doing very little, probably activities, I don’t know, just trying to think back, probably two a week let’s say, for a number of people in the community.

Of course, when COVID struck we saw that as an opportunity to gear up if you like. And that’s when we did a complete mail drop, we went around every house in the village, re-establishing that people understood that we were available for them, and what we could do. And we did that right at the on-set of COVID, early March I think it was, and then that then sort of grew two-fold. It grew that at the time we probably had about five or six active volunteers.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Supporting a small number of villagers. So, what happened with that mail drop was we immediately got contacted by about thirty-five more villages who wished to be volunteers.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** And then that opened the doors then, you know, people started contacting us. So that, that’s how we’ve evolved if you like, and I assume when one day we can look back at this and go back to normality, we’ll probably revert to a few more volunteers because some of those who joined us will probably remain but I imagine the number of people that we support will reduce.

**Interviewer:** And what is the situation with the group at the moment?

**Participant:** Situation of the group is we’re active. We’ve got a total group now of somewhere around – I can’t remember the exact numbers if that’s okay – probably around urm… just short of forty volunteers.

**Interviewer:** Forty, okay.

**Participant:** Yeah, urm, we are supporting the villages at a steady pace now, it was quite, quite a lot in the early few months of the initial lockdown. But now its sort of steadied down as more people are going out and doing their own shopping. But we support urm… small core probably around twenty to thirty villages with a variety. The main is prescriptions, so taking prescriptions, picking up medication, delivering medication urm, food shopping, urm, doing that sort of thing. We’ve now started driving to people so I’ve just sourced this morning that a lady needs to go to a dentist, so we’ve had to make ourselves as COVID secure as we can in our procedures and have the correct PPE. So, we carry out all those functions and, as I say, that’s the steady thing.

We have done some unusual things, I suppose, urm, we’ve been walking dogs for people, we’ve been watering gardens for people. I can’t think of them all of the top of my head, but we have done some interesting things during the last few months.

**Interviewer:** But –

**Participant:** Does that help?

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes, completely.

**Participant:** Is that appropriate?

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes, completely. Because we are, we want to understand not only what groups that were created during COVID but also the group that are already existed –

**Participant:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** -and start to do activities that were also related with COVID needs. So yes, completely. Okay, so what geographical areas has the group covered?

**Participant:** It is only the village that we live in and it is a small community, probably around three hundred to three-hundred-and-fifty dwellings. Urm… yeah, probably eight hundred plus people. And it’s a small village so I would think it’s about one square mile I would imagine - no, we go upside down a bit, but the main community are in a mile square-

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** -so it is a small community.

**Interviewer:** Urm, and form the activities that you mentioned how often did the people in the group did those things? Urm -

**Participant:** How often did they…?

**Interviewer:** Did they do for example shopping, it was something that you did every day or very, not very often?

**Participant:** Urm, I may have to refer – sorry are you getting feedback?

**Interviewer:** Sorry.

**Participant:** Is that me? No? Let me see if I’ve got some \*07:18 audio drops out\* - a quarter end, we provide statists to the [NAME OF NETWORK OF LOCAL CHARITIES] Committee. Urm… during that period… we carried out…. July to the end of September, and it was beginning to ease during that period. I haven’t I don’t know whether I’ve got the previous one – ah, that might be interesting. From the period from the first of April, through to the end of June, we carried out activities to thirty-six clients of which seventeen were new, in other words we’d never done anything for them previously. We had about nearly forty volunteers, of which fourteen were active.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** So, they were doing regular things. The activates we carried out, highest on the list was prescriptions, yeah, shopping, urm… delivering the village magazine because the person was shielding, they couldn’t do it. Taking items to the post office, pumping up car tires, delivering letters, urm, fetching car park passes for the local hospital. So that’s just some of the activities. What we also did was a lot of befriending. So, we had a number of volunteers that carried this out. I think it was about six people, that specifically focused on those people that were on their own and contacted them. So obviously that could not be fact-to-face so that was phone calls.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** We still continue doing that now, urm, a number of people we, we approached them politely with a person who’s been trained in befriending from a local hospice an a few would accept it readily and then others had their own support networks and then weren’t worried about, you know, being called by us. But we’ve got a steady stream now that we keep on supporting, and we imagine that that model will continue. We never did it before COVID, but I think it’s got us to realise that there are people in the village that need that contact they’re alone. So urm, we will continue to do that.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and what kind of resources do you have?

**Participant:** Very little, it’s people. What we found initially, sorry we’ve got funds as well, I can mention a bit more about funds if that’s relevant to you afterwards. But we noticed right at the beginning that we had a very old telephone. Because we were doing it by making - going down the list of volunteers and going, “can you do this?” “no,” so you’d ring somebody else up and so on. We realised immediately that we couldn’t continue like that, so we bought a smart phone through our funds and set up a WhatsApp group of volunteers. And then we broke the volunteers down into different groups that were prepared to do different activities. For example, if you were a driver taking a person around to a hospital appointment, you needed to be DBS checked. But it’s not a problem some one picking up a prescription and just dropping it off at the house. So we had that sort of thing, we had dog walkers – not all forty volunteers wand to walk a dog, so we had a group of volunteers for dog walking, we had a group of volunteers for doing befriending, a group of volunteers doing, you know, watering. So, we needed something like a mobile phone – a good mobile phone with a WhatsApp group. So that works perfectly now, I can put a note out, which I did last night, saying that a lady needs driving, and I think within three or four minutes, I had a response. And then we can organise that, no face-to-face. So, I guess silly really, but the main resources we had, minus the volunteers was a good mobile phone with a WhatsApp group.

**Interviewer:** And particular skills that people, that the volunteers had?

**Participant:** Urm, befriending is a critical one I think, it takes a certain type of person to, you know, ring somebody up cold, if you like, and build a rapport and I said we are lucky to have a member of the team who’s been professionally trained in that, and she’s had to coach the others. There are people who like walking dogs – it’s not a skill, but it’s a like. Urm, but I don’t think there are any other skills, I mean, I’m the coordinator, you’re speaking to me at the moment because I’m a member of the group, I’m a treasurer and I’m the main coordinator, and I guess my skills have been in my previous employment, has been coordination.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** It’s organising. Urm dealing with people. So, you know, I guess that, but no other resources. The funding is a key resource.

**Interviewer:** Funding, so you did have access to some funding?

**Participant:** Yes, we did, we had, we had a balance that, urm… step back a little bit I suppose. Once we’d had the initial… surge of urr interest and we raised funds through charity dinners and so on, we had a set of funds that really only had to pay for insurance, which is maybe only two hundred pound a year. Urr, and the telephone. We had virtually no other outlay because none of the volunteers would accept money for taking somebody – you know they’d never take petrol money for example. So, we had a steady set of funds. Immediately lockdown came, our funds dried up because our main funds were associated with driving people, we could no longer drive people so our funds started, you know fixed costs still kept coming in, we had to purchase a new phone, pay for the urm… the air time if you like every month, the insurance they were coming in. So, I was concerned that eventually, if we didn’t ever get back to normal, we’d run out of funds. Urm, but a grant came through from the [TOWN NAME 1] and [COUNTY NAME] Charities, urr and … when I had announced that to the group of volunteers and a number of them immediately donated money, and a local business immediately gave us about two hundred pound. So, we are now financially stable, I would imagine even without other further income for about the next five years - so it secures us so that we can support the village. But its quite simple, we’ve got low numbers, our assets are worth probably around twelve hundred pound at the moment. But for what we do, you know, it’s only covering the costs – fixed costs each year of about three hundred pound. Okay?

**Interviewer:** Okay, so it’s not very expensive?

**Participant:** Sorry?

**Interviewer:** It’s not very expensive?

**Participant:** No, it’s not very expensive because its mainly coordination, volunteers and insurance.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And how did you get volunteers?

**Participant:** All we did, was we did this mail drop to every house in the village.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** One of the volunteers went around and physically dropped a urm, a paper that we’d put together saying who we were, how to contact us, what we could do for people. As I said, not only did that bring in the people who needed help, it brought in the people who wanted to volunteer. Also, at the same time, a message was pasted on the village Facebook site, Facebook site. So, there were those two activities of communicating to make sure we reached everybody – paper and Facebook, brought in the volunteers.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and who was involved in the coordination? Just you or someone else?

**Participant:** No, urm… I’ve been the main coordinator, but we have a small committee, just the chairperson, the chairman, the the urm secretary and myself. It was mainly the secretary and myself – no the three of us probably did a lot of the coordination at the beginning, because a number of us are… volunteers who’ve been there before were urr needing to shield themselves to be honest. So, they became very inactive during that period, some of them have come forward again now thankfully. So, it was mainly three of us.

**Interviewer:** And how do you coordinate help?

**Participant:** Literally, I get a contact via phone, through the phone, the mobile phone that’s around here somewhere, which the villagers know about, through our communication. They will tell me what I, what they require, I will then, sometimes I will carry out the activity myself, if I can do it – like picking up a prescription, I’ll go and get it. But I put the message out on WhatsApp, depending what is required, so if somebody is saying, “can you come and cut my lawn?” We’ve got a small group of people who can do that, I’ll send it to the small WhatsApp group. If it’s general, prescriptions, I will put that to the full WhatsApp group. So, it was all coordinating through the phone call into that mobile phone, and the request going out of the group. What - the group of volunteers via WhatsApp – what I do though, when I’m looking for somebody to do something for a volunteer, I only mention what the activity is on the large group, for confidentiality. In other words, there’s no need for the whole of the group to know who wants it. When that person comes to me and say, “I will go and fetch the prescription,” then I will give that person the name and the address of the volunteer. So, we try as best we can to anonymise who’s looking, you know, for the help. And as I said we’ve got a small number of people who are DBS cleared so we try and keep a lot of the details away from the non-DBS group.

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

**Participant:** It’s part of the [NAME OF NETWORK OF LOCAL CHARITIES] Commission – [ACRONYM FOR NETWORK OF LOCAL CHARITIES]. That, they forwarded your email to us.

**Interviewer:** So, it was from them that I got the information about your group – now I remember.

**Participant:** Yes, yes. So, they’re the key group that we sort of fit in. So, every quarter, we have to provide them some of the statistics that I just told you about. Urm… during the early lockdown they, they notified us of urm… of the… a grand being available from the [TOWN NAME 1] and [COUNTY NAME] so the larger scale. You know, we deal with [COUNTY NAME] rural, [TOWN NAME 1] and [COUNTY NAME] have the opportunity to provide grants. We were put in touch through the [NAME OF NETWORK OF LOCAL CHARITIES], and then we dealt directly with [TOWN NAME 1] and we were successful in – they gave us £150 which covered the cost of the mobile phone and PPE for our drivers. But it’s the [NAME OF NETWORK OF LOCAL CHARITIES] that we’re – we’re linked in. You also, one of the members of the group is the village agent.

**Interviewer:** Mmm.

**Participant:** Do you understand the village agent?

**Interviewer:** No.

**Participant:** Well that comes under [NAME OF NETWORK OF LOCAL CHARITIES] as well. But the village agent has been established for quite a few years and they deal with individuals in the same, in the same village as we do, urm… and maybe through they’re being, they’re details have been passed on through medical, or whatever, but they deal with them and we do not, we do not share if you like the details on the individuals, but we keep in touch on principles. Like the village agent might make contact via phone – through the WhatsApp group and say, “I’ve got a load of DAB radios to go to those in need during the crisis.” So, we’ll try to then coordinate that to find out who needs them. So, we work together very closely.

**Interviewer:** Mmm.

**Participant:** I can’t think of any – there are other examples they’re not jumping to my head. But there is quite a lot of communication between the [NAME OF NETWORK OF LOCAL CHARITIES] and the various, [VILLAGE NAME] – the various [NAME OF TYPE OF GROUP]. We’re just one of a number in [COUNTY NAME]. There are other active and larger [NAME OF TYPE OF GROUP] in [COUNTY NAME].

**Interviewer:** Okay, and any other connection with other groups, organisation, political, community organisations?

**Participant:** Urm… no not really. Indirectly sometimes we’re aware of what the [COUNTY NAME] borough council are doing, so communications come via [NAME OF NETWORK OF LOCAL CHARITIES] on that, we don’t tend to get anything directly from the [TOWN NAME 2] Borough. But other than that, urr, and that covers both political obviously because it’s the [POLITICAL PARTY] who are running it and the borough council – no, nothing to my knowledge.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And has the group tried to get any official recognition? For example, becoming a charity or a company?

**Participant:** No, not official. Can you, can you suggest any more? We’re not looking for recognition.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Urr, we were contacted by the BBC right at the beginning of the pandemic, urr but other than to find out what we did and how to be contacted so they could broadcast it. But other than that… urm… no, I’m sorry no. We don’t do it for any recognition.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so… urm some groups want official or institutional recognition, becoming and charity or a company urm, yeah but-

**Participant:** We are a charity.

**Interviewer:** Yes, you already are, okay. Urm… in terms of urm… just to come back to your own experience, urm, how urm… you mentioned that you had some experience in organising before. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

**Participant:** I was urr, well I am an [OCCUPATION]. And I used to manage very large teams of people who, you know, organising, if I didn’t have the skill organising, I wouldn’t have lasted in my job.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** So picking this up, urm, during a time when I was locked-down myself, I actually found I was back in the office, my wife used to think, “you’re back at work, I don’t see you.” Because it was very difficult in the early days. Now its not very difficult at all and it’s not much, much time consuming, but I was spending days initially urr responding setting up the WhatsApp groups, communicating, briefing people and sort of updating them, encouraging them, you know, that sort of thing in the early days. I don’t – I give people regular updates now and again when we’ve done a quarterly report. So… it’s a lot less now but my organisational skills helped me a lot in the start.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and… previous experience of organising groups like this one?

**Participant:** Urm… only my colleagues and staff and my clients… really. So, you know, using co-ordination still, communication stills, briefing and so on, so no.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and why did you get involved?

**Participant:** Why did I get involved? I retired… urr, back in – trying to remember now… urr it was about five years ago now. And I had lots of things that I wanted to do anyway, but charities was one of them. So, I’m active in, well, two at the moment which should be three but one’s a hospice and they’ve had to shut that down at the moment obviously, others going in like myself. So, I do driving for a charity one day a week, I’m doing it tomorrow, for a hospital**.** Urm, and… urm this - so, that’s part of what – you know part of other things that I do, leisure wise I mean. And I just wanted – you’ll probably hear this so many times – I wanted to give something back. I worked all my life and took, but I’ve never given anything back. So, I’m not helping the village that I’ve lived in for thirty years, but I commuted for twenty-five of them. So, you know, you don’t really get involved, or you don’t really help the village when you’re just sleeping here, effectively. Urm… for those reasons actually. And I think a lot of the volunteers are in the similar position.

**Interviewer:** Yeah? What kind of motivations urr do you think they had the active participants?

**Participant:** I think initially one of wanting to help, two they had a lot of time on their hands –

**Interviewer:** Time.

**Participant:** -you know a lot of the volunteers are it he younger group and they- weren’t able to go to work so they were working form home. Urm… but you know. I gave you an interesting statistic earlier, we’ve probably got about forty volunteers of which… less than half are active. So, there’s still a large number of volunteers on the WhatsApp group that volunteered that probably haven’t’ carried out a task, a single task. But they still cling on – I don’t want to remove them. They have to remove themselves if they wish, they’re not seeing anything confidential. Urm, but I do think it is about, “well, I’ve got an opportunity here, I can help.” And a number of them – that was their main motive, that’s what they wanted to do was to help. And I think a number of them will remain in the group and a number have now become DBS qualified because they want to continue to help. Urr the one guy wanted to do it, he wanted to help but I think he wanted to go out on his motorbike as well because he wasn’t allowed to go out on his motorbike. So, I used to send him all around the place picking up prescriptions. You know, so it broke the boredom tor him and if the police stopped him, this was early in the lockdown, he could say, well I’m delivering a prescription, no matter that he used to drive all around the country to get there, but that was another thing. So yeah, lots of motivations.

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

**Participant:** Sorry, I don’t quite understand?

**Interviewer:** How do you fit the activities that you do in this group in other parts of your life? Does it fit?

**Participant:** It’s fitted quite well, urm... I’ve only handed over the responsibilities I think on two occasions this year since COVID struck because I was going on holiday and I didn’t want to be bothered then, urm, to be honest. And that’s understandable, I can’t - I don’t mind going away for a day or two – I take the phone with me then, but if I’m going away for a week or more, I don’t want the phone with me because then I didn’t want it really cutting in. But one of the other team would pick the phone up – they would have the phone. So it fitted in, urm… my day, I fitted it into my day, I am retired, you know, I could be doing something else now, but I’m quite happy to do this. I took a call earlier this morning, the way its sorted out at the moment that probably took less than twenty minutes to resolve.

**Interviewer:** Okay, very fast.

**Participant:** If it got more than that I would be doing what I was doing in the early days which spending days here coordinating. But thank-fully that’s not like it now.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned that in the beginning it took a lot of time from you –

**Participant:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** -it was only at the beginning, or during the whole process?

**Participant:** Urm… the beginning was the hardest because we were then setting the group up – sorry, not setting the [VILLAGE NAME 1] Group up, that was in existing, was setting up the new communication methods and dealing with all the extra volunteers, and all the other help that people requires. So sometimes it was dealing, you know, I do remember one person, we’d not dealt with her before, urm… and she wanted to hand one of our non-DBS people our credit card to go shopping. Which I had to resolve, you know there was no other way about that and that meant me contacting the lady, finding out who could speak to – I had to speak to her daughter. So, finding there was complications in the set-up of individual people requiring help. But now that’s not needed anymore because we’ve gone through al of that and we fully understand how to deal with this client now. What needs she has and how to help her – she was the one who rang earlier. So, you know, it’s not so complicated. There was a lot, you know if I look at the scale it was up here, back in March, and now it’s down to a steady, you know, a steady level.

**Interviewer:** Mmm.

**Participant:** So, it’s not, you know, it’s not too time consuming. Even the quarterly report now I’ve got it down to a fine art – it doesn’t take me long. I collect the statistics as I go along, combine it in a spreadsheet, you know.

**Interviewer:** And for others, for the other participants?

**Participant:** Urm, the secretary who organising the befriending. She probably comes next with the amount of work that she does because she does coordinate it as well as carrying our activities. She also is the link between myself and the [NAME OF NETWORK OF LOCAL CHARITIES], so she deals with [NAME OF NETWORK OF LOCAL CHARITIES] people but I couldn’t tell you to what extent, what scale – I don’t think it’s a lot she fits int in quite well, she’s retired as well.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and how about emotional effort?

**Participant:** Urm, it’s been quite hard on times, I think. Urm… a number of the people that we’ve helped have passed away, quite recently. You know, there’s been a number of deaths, not COIVD related thankfully. But that that is quite sad because you do get to know somebody. The person who urm... as I said in the beginning, got interested in setting this up in the village. She passed away last year, the lady was ninety-four, and I got to know her extremely well through supporting her. So, it becomes emotional in that sense. It also becomes emotional when you see you’re helping people who are doing their best to try and help themselves and are very proud, yeah. And that can become a bit emotional as well. But, you know, I thoroughly enjoy it, meeting the people. So, do – all the active volunteers, build a relationship with the people that they’re helping, and I think perhaps that’s added to the village, to be honest. I think these people have always been there but they’ve managed somehow or another and all of a sudden their support networks were destroyed and – or they had to stay in and urm, you know, we’ve built up a rapport with them.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and have people drop out of the group?

**Participant:** Yeah, not too many. Probably… a few in the beginning realised it wasn’t what the wanted, so probably we lost a few in the beginning, about four or five maybe. Since then… two, two three, so not a large fall off. There is, as I say urm… about twenty that are in there that are completely inactive. But they’re not dropping off, so I don’t know whether they’re waiting for the particular task that they would be happy to carry out, or they just like to see things going on. I don’t know. I don’t feel in a position to challenge them on why they’re on there. They volunteered, their names on there.

**Interviewer:** And the people that drop out? Do you - any other reasons that may have led to that?

**Participant:** Urm… no not really. No, I think it’s as I said, not sure if that’s what they wanted to do, and – oh and we had one or two that obviously they’re commitments when they got back to work. So then yes, one or two pulled off because they said, really, “I’ll drop off now because – you know, I don’t have the time that I had.”

**Interviewer:** So, a practical reason?

**Participant:** Yes, a practical reason.

**Interviewer:** Urm, any other problems or any problems that they group have faced challenge, problems urr in terms of organising, communication, difference in aims?

**Participant:** No, there hasn’t be any urm… what’s the word I’m looking for? It’s all gone very well, there’s been no issues that I can really think of urm, to tell you. I guess, the very fact that I’m trying to think now, but there’s nothing that jumps out at me. Urm… no, I mean we had initial problems in dealing with topple who had no money and were wanting to buy things. But, I can’t I can’t think – sorry I can’t. if I think of anything, [NAME OF INTERVIEWER]-

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** I will drop you an e-mail, but I really can’t think of any issues that we’ve had.

**Interviewer:** Okay, no problem.

**Participant:** The only complication – I’m just thinking recently we had a complication – it wasn’t an awful complication, one of the ladies that had been supported by a particular volunteer, doing a weekly shopping, wanted urm… simple thing, she was getting annoyed because her wallpaper – a price of wall-paper as coming off the wall. The repair though would need a latter above a staircase which dangerous, so I had to look up our insurance and found that we had to carry out a risk assessment, which I carried out. And their lines said you could only go ahead if I was there to assist the person that was carrying out the task. Which was unusual for what the [GROUP NAME] do – a bit of decoration. But urm, you know, our insurance would only be covered if there was a risk assessment. But to be honest that’s it. I mean we’re dealing domestically there’s nothing that I can think of, of real concern.

**Interviewer:** And even in the group, urm, the communication within the group, everything went well?

**Participant:** Now and again they communicate on the WhatsApp group because it’s there and usually its common interest. What it hasn’t developed into, thank goodness, is a chatter – like a, you know like a Facebook social, it was never meant to be a social and I think everybody recognises that. Sometimes there is something funny that crops up dealing with something, but its’s very minimal thankfully. I’ve never had to go in and say, because I’d hate to do it you know, “can we stop the chatter, because you know, we’re dealing with work, if you like on this.” But other than that, no.

We did meet – sorry, we did manage, when we were at the point sometime in the past where we were allowed to gather outside with thirty people, we did had our annual general meeting in the garden of one of the volunteers, and we invited those that we help and a number of the volunteers, and we got to near thirty. And that was a very nice day it was very good weather; we did our AGM but it was also an opportunity to see some of the volunteers face-to-face. And that worked quite sell actually. It would have been nice if it could have been, I don’t know, a larger group and we could have had more, urm, but it worked very well. But that’s been a social activity, but that’s only one.

**Interviewer:** What was the goal of that activity?

**Participant:** What was the-?

**Interviewer:** The aim of the activity?

**Participant:** The aim was twofold, one we had to have an AGM as part of our constitution, and it was well overdue. But the main aim was, as I said, to put the faces to the names of some of the volunteers. I’m dealing with a lot of people that I may not – even know who I’m dealing with. Sometimes the WhatsApp on the WhatsApp will have a photograph of themselves, but a lot of them are, you know, faceless, so we were trying to put faces, which we did to an extent a number of my colleagues – I’ve got to know a lot of the volunteers face-to-face but my colleagues on the committee haven’t. So that was a good opportunity for them to see it, see the volunteers.

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

**Participant:** … Urm, I don’t think there’s anything we’ve done to help, other… I suppose initially a lot of updates –

**Interviewer:** Updates.

**Participant:** -on how we were doing statistics even so they could think, “oh, wow, we are helping a lot of people, you know.” If we – at the height I think we were helping fifty plus people, but in a small village that’s, you now, a good percentage, and I think that helped for the interest of people to know that we’re doing something. We are helping. The other thing we did, urm… sorry, I’ll step back, the other thing I do on WhatsApp is give them a synopsis of what we’ve been going in the last quarter based on the reports. And just updating them on, I don’t know, interesting things that we’ve been up to. What we then do as well, we utilise the village magazine which is a paper magazine, the editor is actually our chairman of the committee, and we try to get an article int here every month or so, on the activities of the [GROUP NAME].

One of the things that was a problem before all this came in for us, we always used to challenge ourselves, do the - are the villagers aware of what we do? We get a half day, half page in our village magazine every month reminding people who we are. But since then, obviously doing a mail drop, urm, dealing with a lot more people, urr, doing regular articles in the magazine, having the AGM, we think now it’s well established. There may be, we hope not, there may be one or two people people out in the village that could do with our help and either don’t do it because they’re proud or don’t know about us. But… it’s – we’re more confident now that people know what we’re about. And I think that in itself creates the willingness and the intention to keep going. You know? And to be honest the volunteers enjoy what they do, they, I get messages, they comeback to me each time to say, “I’ve been – I’ve sported this out for Mrs X – we had a good natter, she’s in good spirits today.” Yeah? And there’s that as well – sorry I’ve just thought of one other thing. So, there is, that’s the sorry of thing that we employ.

Sorry, while I remember this, what we did have one day, due to the befriending, we couldn’t contact urm… one of our villagers, so that concerned us. We had the contact details for the daughter, so I contacted the daughter and she told us she’d been hospitalised. So, we said right, “we’re there when she comes back, is there anything we can do?” And what we found out at the time was this lady is a very keen gardener, she can’t do it as often as she used to – she certainly can’t water the garden anymore, and her daughter used to come across at six o’clock in the morning to water her garden for us. And through that, you know, the phone call had been befriending we found out that there was an activity there they didn’t think we’d be able to carry out for them. And we established that we have a small group of six people who do it regularly, and we haven’t stopped even though its raining. So, what happens is the volunteers still go down because what they do is to chat to that lady through the French windows. And, I mean, it’s helped her, she gets lots of people going, and these people are enjoying a chat with her because she’s been in the village for so long, she’s got history of the things that she’s done to help people. So, there are those interesting factors as well that I think, if you had any doubt about whether we were helping, if you were doing that watering group, you know you are. And it’s very fulfilling to be honest. And enjoyable because she’s very interested.

**Interviewer:** And why did you do, why did you decide to do those specific things that you mentioned that might have helped the group keep going? It was strategic or just ad-hoc?

**Participant:** Urm, it’s not ad – I do it ad-hoc at the moment update the group. But I guess it was my intention in the beginning, with a large group of people, what you don’t want them doing is sitting there wondering what’s going on. Because they’ll think, “why have I volunteered, I don’t see anything, I don’t know, you know.” So, I guess its just part of what I used to do. It’s important to communicate with people just, show what they’re doing. So, communication has been the key part that, probably, in getting the villages to know what we’re going, getting the volunteers to know what – you know, they’re contributing to.

**Interviewer:** Um-hmm, okay, and how about the lessons or learnings, urm, have you learnt something from coordinating this group?

**Participant:** The… fundamentally the people they want to help. Yeah, I think there’s a hard core of people who really enjoy just helping and supporting. For no other reason, you know, I enjoy what I do in my other activities, it means sometimes two hundred mile a day driving patients, but I know they’ve had their radiotherapy – its very rewarding. And the same thing in the [GROUP NAME]. Maybe on a less critical you know, level. But that lady that I referred to knowing her gardens being watered is not going to die on her. You know and it is very fulfilling. So that’s the lessons I think for us is that urr, it is very fulfilling and for me to steer the volunteers who jump in, as I said I can send a message out and sometimes they’re fighting, you know, like I get three or four pings back immediately, “I’ll do it, “ “I’ll do it!” You know?

**Interviewer:** Mmm, anything else about for example how local governments work- ?

**Participant:** No.

**Interviewer:** About yourself?

**Participant:** No, no, I mean, on the government side, we’re established, we know what we’re about, we’ve learnt a bit more about where we can go for help and coordinating. But I think we satisfy the village needs at the moment, in that category.

For myself, urm… it helped me get through the early days of lockdown for a start. I mean I threw myself into it. But it’s just the fulfilling part knowing that we’re helping some villagers. I didn’t do anything for twenty-five years – well sorry, that’s a bit of an over-statement but do you know what I mean? I was a commuter, now I feel that in the last five years I’ve thrown something back into the village.

**Interviewer:** Hmm, I see. And how do you see the future of this group?

**Participant:** Ah, well, hopefully a future where we’re not lockdown, you know, that these vaccines do come through and help us. I see the group then continuing where we were, but probably on a bigger scale I think because this has brought out a group of people that didn’t use us before that will continue to use us, for exactly the same… won’t be the same processes because pre-COVID we, we didn’t have much admin, there’s a bit more admin now. Urm… but other than that, I think, you know, we’ll continue. And we’ll always look for those who need help and we’ll also look for ways of helping those. Yeah, like that lady didn’t know she needed her garden watered – she – you know, well didn’t know you could do that. But now they know, “ooh, got a problem with the lawn,” or, “I’m ill at the moment can somebody come and cut my grass?” You know, we can do that.

**Interviewer:** Okay, urm, is there anything that you would like to add? I think I have asked everything.

**[Debriefing]**

**[End of Interview]**