**Date: 23/11/2020**

**Duration:** 01:11:33

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

Urr and first of all I would like to ask you some questions about how your group began. So, what is the name of your group?

**Participant:** It’s called [GROUP NAME]

**Interviewer:** Okay. When did the group start?

**Participant:** … It - the group originally started in 2015 urm and it would have been [GROUP NAME]. We started because \*interference 01:02\* coordinated at that time. Urm and if urr \*interference 01:09\* flooded to get people to bring sandbags down to the particular area but that –

**Interviewer:** Sorry, I think-

**Participant:** -not possible and we had a \*interference 01:22\* however, when we got to March this year, I was working in [CITY NAME 1] as a [OCCUPATION 1] \*interference 01:37\*-

**Interviewer:** I’m so sorry I’m having some problems, I’m so sorry but I cannot hear you very well. Can I ask you if you don’t mind to turn off the camera as well maybe something with the –

**Participant:** Yeah, yeah that’s fine.

**Interviewer:** It will be –

**Participant:** Is that, can you still hear me now?

**Interviewer:** Urr, yes.

**Participant:** Yeah?

**Interviewer:** Okay, so let’s see if that is the problem. So, you were saying how did, actually I lost everything I could hear how did the group start? I’m so sorry.

**Participant:** Okay, so originally [GROUP NAME] was just a group on Facebook having about a hundred members and we used to help, if we were flooded in [TOWN NAME] that started about 2015, if if the lower levels of [TOWN NAME] were to be flooded other people could join in, get sandbags and 4x4 and go to the areas of the flooding and help their neighbours out. And that worked quite well when we are flooded and that continues to work quite well when we are flooded. However, because I was working in [CITY NAME 1] in, well I am still working in [CITY NAME 1], in March I could see what was about to happened that we were about to be locked-down and I was concerned for the community in [TOWN NAME]. Urm, so I made a couple of phone calls to some friends of mine and we resurrected [GROUP NAME] as a COVID mutual support group essentially. And we have now, and from that time in march we have a management committee, we have had over seventy volunteers, we’ve worked with 2,228 at least, probably nearer 3,000 individual call outs urr to people who have either been isolated in lockdown or due to the restrictions unable to get out for essential shopping or prescriptions.

**Interviewer:** Urm, and has anything changed since you start to do that? Since you start the mutual aid group?

**Participant:** Yeah yeah, we’ve we… streamlined our services, like I said I could quite easily tell you that last Thursday we had 2,228 because one of the things we did was we ran it urm along, we had a telephone number that was given to us by one of the local churches, urm we set up a volunteer helpline bank of people who were able to manage the telephone lines. Urm, we then developed our services backstage if you will to have a database and again with all the data protection issues and making sure that it was safe from a safeguarding perspective. And actually one of the local members of the community because we asked volunteers what skills they had initially, and there members, and then members of the public, where they were needed, and we eventually got this as a safe database that was specifically set up for us and now it’s being used in other areas as well, urm for specifically for this job, and we call that our dispatch team. So that when the helpline call comes in, they input it onto our database which then goes out to our dispatch team who then contact our volunteers, and either do that for the shopping, or get their prescriptions for them. And that has been streamlined a great deal in the time that we’ve been working.

Urm, one of our main concerns from my perspective was safeguarding and financial management and financial safeguarding, so we’ve had card readers, we’ve also had gift vouchers so there’s no physical money that passes through between our volunteers and urr the clients, for want of a better word, for the shopping. Urm, and… as I say we’ve also put in place our safeguarding procedures so that those who are most vulnerable feel that we’ve got a solid service in there as well.

Urm, so we’ve got a management committee of about nine, we have a constitution, urr yes, and we still meet ever fortnight, initially we were meeting every week. If there’s a particular issue we’ll still meet urr by Zoom usually. Urr, and there was some members of the management committee that I still haven’t met in person, urr which seems a bit odd, urr but that’s the way it is. And we’ve all now got our own particular roles that we take onboard. Our management committee consists of some clergy, some district councillors, some town councillors, urm people with specific skills in urm… problem solving, IT backgrounds urm… yeah, so yeah.

And then one of our other aims of the group particularly was to support our local businesses in urm, in what we’re doing, so if it was shopping we’d try to keep it local so we promoted the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, we really quite in we’re still got a lot of those shops and businesses and were able to manage to help promote those and some of our cafes and things that were doing take-aways and deliveries to some people. And again, with the foodbank and we worked with the rotary and more latterly actually the football club in this half term to highlight the work that they were doing, urr to come together as a community really.

**Interviewer:** Okay, can you explain what geographical area has the group covered?

**Participant:** Urm, we cover the area of [TOWN NAME] town, [TOWN NAME] itself, so that’s urm… its twenty… they say its twenty-five thousand people don’t they. Yeah, it’s the town of [TOWN NAME] so we go from the edge of urm... yeah [TOWN NAME] itself really is what we cover.

**Interviewer:** And you mention what the activities of the group were doing –

**Participant:** Yep.

**Interviewer:** Urm, so you did shopping, collecting what else? Just to have an idea.

**Participant:** Shopping, collecting prescriptions, we did a little bit of urm… we we worked with our neighbouring mutual aid group who did urr – we knew, we worked urr in the the in the middle of the lockdown we had some work that we were doing with urr [ORGANISATION NAME 1] which is a volunteer organisation across [COUNTY NAME], urm and we knew our neighbouring group were doing transport to and from hospitals for some people so we’d give that over to them. But we’d also, our local GPs sometimes asked us to urm… deliver sample pots, we didn’t like to do it, we didn’t do it very often, but if it was a really need we would do that. But it was mainly shopping and and prescription requests that we did.

**Interviewer:** And how often?

**Participant:** And also, we also worked with urm, an organisation that was about to set up in March, they were waiting for their lottery bid called [ORGANISATION NAME 2] because one of the things that we were very concerned about was the loneliness and isolation of a lot of the elderly people in our town. Because when you think about [TOWN NAME]’s population, we know that 60% are over sixty, and urm, the last portion of them are over eighty, so and we know that they were going to be isolated. And so we worked alongside [ORGANISATION NAME 2] and urm they’ve now got their lottery grant and are fully constituted, and they’ve taken on a sort of listening ear role for their urr and we’ve referred for want of a better word, our clients into that, with our clients permission.

**Interviewer:** Any other local groups that you worked with? Local organisations?

**Participant:** Well the town council gave us grants urm… the district council have supported us; both our rotary clubs have supported us. Urm, the churches together in [TOWN NAME] have supported us. As I say urr, I’m the chair but my vice chair is a member of the clergy in urr [TOWN NAME] and when I was working up in [CITY NAME 1], urm... I urm she was doing lots of stuff on the ground to set up a lot of the stuff, so urm it really is urm our management team is highly specialised, I would think, in what we’re doing. And we’ve used skills, even in our safeguarding, some of our – you know, some of our clients, we’ve instead of having different people coming in on different days, we’ve had specific volunteers given to certain clients just in case there was specific issues. And as I say, I think I urm, we’ve referred, out of those 3,000 calls we’ve probably preferred about six to adult social care. Because we had concerns that they were elderly that they weren’t managing with there, with there – and they were already known in fact to adult social care in [COUNTY NAME].

**Interviewer:** And how many people are in the group?

**Participant:** How many people, urr in the group itself? 1,400.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and the coordination team, I didn’t - how many?

**Participant:** Nine, about nine.

**Interviewer:** About nine, okay. And from the, the large group how many were active helpers doing the volunteers activities that you mentioned?

**Participant:** Well, we said that was about seventy, at the height of the pandemic. Urm, that’s probably gone own quite a lot urr, to about ten - I wouldn’t know actually off the top of my head but I know that it’s a lot less than that now, probably more about twenty regulars - probably less than that. I mean a lot of them were teachers at the time and a lot of them in lockdown in the summer we were helping, because one of the other thing we wanted to do was to safeguard again, so we looked at, you know, were they DBS checked and we put some of ours through DBSs that hadn’t got them and then we needed that we didn’t have to be to that level to do that, but we wanted to make sure that, as I say, the people that were turning up at the doorstep were going to be legitimate and genuine, urm, and weren’t going to cause a particular issue. And again, we also put in place PPE for our volunteers if they wanted it that we still have available for them urm, going into. And ID as well, going into our local Morrison’s, urr to make sure that they’ve got, again that they know that they’re legitimate, doing what they’re doing.

**Interviewer:** And with, during the second lockdown? How is the situation at the moment?

**Participant:** Well in the first lockdown we were working, our helpline I was working the helpline in those days, urm we were eight till late seven days a week apart from bank holidays. And I know even on the Saturday’s and Sundays we were taking up to about forty calls a day. Urm… so but this lockdown, because we tried to empower a lot for our more elderly people to either use urm online shopping and bits and pieces its gone right down. I think last week we had six or seven, maybe eight prescription requests, one shopping request. Urm, so it has gone right down this lockdown, but we have remained open and our helpline now is only open for three hours a day, nine until twelve, urm, Monday to Friday. So, we’ve really put it down, but we’ve tried to empower our clients to think of other ways around urm, the lockdown situation and most of them as I say have done.

**Interviewer:** And why, the reason why you did that?

**Participant:** Because we didn’t want them to be completely dependent on us. Urm, you know, we’re not going to be here forever, urm we’re not, yes we’re going to be [GROUP NAME], yes if something like the flooding I I suppose when that started we didn’t want that to urm… and we didn’t want them to become dependent on us completely. Urm I know the lockdown legislation and those that were shielding, yes they still have a need but we don’t want them to think that we’re going to do their shopping for them every week because they’re over seventy. We need the to start to build back up that they can manage that themselves, or there are other options, you know. Urm and again when, for example Sainsburys or Tescos or whoever they used to use as their delivery option, in April and May when you couldn’t get slots, or you couldn’t get shopping, or you couldn’t do that, or they weren’t that computer literate, we urm… we did step into the breach but that’s not an ongoing long term option and that’s not, for them, as I mean I’m a [OCCUPATION 1] you’re in the department of psychology, for their own well being we didn’t want them to become depended urm on our particular services. Urm, ours was always going to be a stop gap. Urm, as I say our constitution say we’ll run to March but if the need is no longer there as it is, we will close sooner than that. But we don’t’ want people to be dependent on us.

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

**Participant:** Resources?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Participant:** Urm a lot of skills- as I say different skills. Urm-

**Interviewer:** What kind of skills? You mentioned a few already.

**Participant:** Yeah, urm… resource – I mean the resources that we’ve got the physical resources that we had initially were telephone line, which we then diverted to other people’s telephone lines. We’ve got this, as I say this database system that’s available on on, and everything is remote. Urm, we’ve got PPE that’s a resource. Urm... good will and community spirit and a lot of skills within [TOWN NAME] that we’ve used and pulled together. Urm…

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** What other kind of resources – I mean we used, as I say our links with [ORGANISATION NAME 1] in [COUNTY NAME] working with other colleagues, as I say, who knew the area as well. We used our district councillor colleagues; we used our town councillor colleagues. Urr, so the church – all those sorts of people and all their skills kind of come together. They mayor’s been very supportive in [TOWN NAME] of us urm…

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Urm, what else were you considering when you meant ‘resources’

**Interviewer:** Access to funds you mention also.

**Participant:** We urm, initially we got a grant from district council we got a grant from the town council, urr because what we did was buy card readers, that was one of our main things was, urr, we are paying a small portion for a phone line, we are paying for the database usage, urr. We bought card readers, again, and gift vouchers from Morrisons and the main – because we didn’t want money to pass between the hands so urm, the card readers were there. We then also had a loan, I think, from… the – I’m not very good with where the money, but the load from the urm diocese of [CITY NAME 2], urm and some of the, they’ve given us a loan that we can use. Urm… but I think that’s going to be there as well, and as I say the rotary club has done as well.

**Interviewer:** And how did you get people, the volunteers, to be involved?

**Participant:** Urm, as I say we used our Facebook group, we just got that out there again.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Urm… and word of mouth, although we were locked down it was virtual word of mouth, urm we put it out on virtual media we we put it out in the radio, on the radio locally, again using people that we knew so [LOCAL RADIO STATION] was very useful to us. Urm, and again through the churches and through people who knew people and the kind of town that [TOWN NAME] was we very quickly got a lot of people together. Urm… and urm… who are managing to help urm... yeah, I think that was how it did really. Particularly back in March when people wanted to help, urm, and urm knowing their neighbours were there.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so you have a Facebook account and also you have other social group -media group, or just Facebook?

**Participant:** We have Facebook the main page, which you’re welcome to have lot at: [GROUP NAME]. Urm we have a management group as well. Urm we have management meetings once a fortnight, anything that comes up in the meantime, safeguarding, anyone can contact, urm, like I say I’m a safeguarding officer as is urm… my vice chair who we both have experience that can come up at any time, and anybody can be briefed up is there was a situation but that’s never really come up. Urm, so urm…

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

**Participant:** Yeah, I did, urr the first sort of week I put it on there, but I never really heard anything from them?

**Interviewer:** Mmm.

**Participant:** Urm, I put it out initially –

**Interviewer:** As part of the mutual aid network, yeah?

**Participant:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** But we use [ORGANISATION NAME 1] network and as I say, we went out, in April we went out on Chanel 4 news as well, urr they came done to see us as a positive how we were managing the situation down here which was, which they did and how useful clients found our service which is great urr publicity for us. We’ve also got a regular slot in our… urm… free advertising magazine that comes around the town every week. So the first thing we did – in fact it wasn’t just the Facebook group, I’m thinking about it now, was one of the first things we did was we realised that not everybody would be on social media, so we did a letter box drop to every single home in [TOWN NAME] and that’s where some of the money initially went to to the local printers actually printed it off at a very good rate for us, if not free, I can’t remember it was a very long time ago. And we got groups of people, urr socially distanced organised to deliver the streets for example. And urm... so dropped it through everybody’s door with our telephone number on it and when we would be open. And then through Facebook group and then again through urm… the [TOWN NAME] free magazine that we get through every month, they would always put an article in for us so that we know… people who aren’t on social media do have an idea of what’s going on for us and urm, how we can support.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Urm, and you mentioned that you, I’m sorry, do you want to –

**Participant:** \*Interference 23:44\*

**Interviewer:** Can you see me? No?

**Participant:** I can see you, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Ah, okay great.

**Participant:** And my camera’s on? Yeah, no?

**Interviewer:** Err.

**Participant:** I can hear you now it’s fine.

**Interviewer:** I think it’s better. So, urm… so I was saying that, asking you if your group had tried to get any official recognition, for example becoming a charity or a company, something like that?

**Participant:** Urm, we tried, we are \*interference 24:18\* we’re looking at opportunities, at one point, urr we did get a bank account but to be honest with you I don’t think we will continue long enough to go down the charitable route. As I say we’ve had help and support with come of our funding, the churches have, you know, let us, urr one of the church treasures is actually our accountant - has has, opted to be our treasurer so they have a special bank account in their bank you know that they’ve given to us so we can use that. So again the, it’s\*interference 25:03\* and but no we haven’t thought about – we have thought about it \*interference 25:10\* got a constitution, urm, we have got urm, an understanding of what we want volunteers to do, not do, probably, So urm…we do get regular clients quite often urm… but \*interference 25:30\* we have considered it but urm, at the moment we don’t think that’s a particular option. But as I say you know, we might do in the future, if something were to happen again.

**Interviewer:** Okay, urm, tell me, now I would like to understand a bit more about your previous experience of organising groups like this.

**Participant:** Okay.

**Interviewer:** So, you are a [OCCUPATION 1]?

**Participant:** I’m a [OCCUPATION 1], urm… I was a [TOWN NAME] [ELECTED POSITION], urm so I and I’ve lived here on and off all my life, my mother’s lived here so I know the town very well, I went back to school here. Urr organising something like this before – never really. I suppose urm… but knowing people and having that organisation around you urm, as I say knowing people who have those kinds of skills. You know, I did know some of them and I did pull them together as a bit of a team initially. Urm, you know I knew one of my district councillors I could work with called \*interference 26:46\* because I went through - I didn’t know the local mayor but I went to the mayors secretary and said, “look we need to do this.” Urm, then as I say, urm… there were some people what came to me and said, “right what can I do, what can we do?” Urm and the a couple of - there’s a social worker, urm somebody in business stepped forward as well, a couple of other people stepped forward, another friend of mine who I knew was very good at problem solving, urm said she wanted something more to do and suddenly we moulded into this management group. Urm... and as I say the volunteers, it was particularly strong I the urm first lockdown hen the schools were closed. Urm, but then there was a lot of people now finding it harder, now that the schools have reopened., but we’re still having people who are going out there and managing the service and… still meeting the needs. Urr \*interference 27:57\* I had to use the service last week because I was lockdown and I had to get a prescription urm because I didn’t have, within seven hours - they didn’t know how I was I mean they just went in there as a job type of thing – and within seven hours I got my prescription through. So urm, it works, I wasn’t meaning to be a mystery shopper, but it happened. Urm, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** So, urm…

**Interviewer:** Why?

**Participant:** It was the having the community feel.

**Interviewer:** Sorry?

**Participant:** Just having the community feel, having that kind of, have I done that kind of thing before, I suppose yes… \*interference 28:43: *some of my* [WORK IN OCCUPATION 1] *urm… has helped int eh ground, and I’ve done in the town previous… through my role… but not much*\*

**Interviewer:** Not much, okay, and urm, and why did you get involved?

**Participant:** Why?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Participant:** Why did I get involved?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Participant:** Oh because I care about the community, my mother - was working in [CITY NAME 1], you know, Mums down here, I know that she can cope, I know that she’s got friends around her but I know that there’s an awful lot of people that maybe didn’t have. And urm I wanted to make sure that the community pulled together but actually, that it pulled together safely, if that makes sense. Safely and securely, that there wasn’t, that there wasn’t just one route that we went down and that I could use my skills to work with that and I knew there were other people that would be able to do that. Urm… there was another thing floated at the time, another ‘check on your neighbour’ scheme, but again you don’t know who’s going to bang on your door and, you know, again… as I say maybe some more dodge people around that, you know, so I wanted it as safe as possible for everybody who wanted to use it or needed to sue it and that was quite important to us all, really at the beginning and I think that still is the \*audio drops out 30:28\* I think.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and what is your role in the group?

**Participant:** What is my?

**Interviewer:** Role, what do you do?

**Participant:** Oh, my role… urm they call me the chair because I set it up so I do chair a lot of the meetings, the vice chair can be a bit more forthright so sometimes \*audio interference 30:53 *let her do it if we need to have a ??*. And I’m also the safeguarding officer, so is there’s a safeguarding concern or there has been something that’s come about people come to me about it. As I say, as we’ve progressed, urm, people have become more autonomous in their roles and don’t necessarily have to come unless there is something particular and they bring it up in the meeting or e-mail it or Zoom it to us or… yeah as I say we have a management group set up on here so tend to have those conversion ongoing as and when we need them. So yes, urm, my role is to promote it, is to make sure its safe-

**Interviewer:** Has it changed?

**Participant:** - and oversee it but it kind of oversees itself now.

**Interviewer:** Has it changed at all, during the process?

**Participant:** Yeah, I think we’ve all become, I mean we didn’t know what we were going into when we first set off. Urm… has it changed? Yeah, I think we’ve become more, we know what we’re doing now so that makes it a little bit easier. Urm... but again there’s still some issues like find a volunteer at short notice, managing people’s expectations can be difficult –

**Interviewer:** Sorry I can’t.

**Participant:** \*audio interference 32:30\* empowered, can be difficult. Urm… and yeah, bring them back out other side can be difficult, managing their expectations that we’re not going to be there all the time and actually no they do need to urr, to urm, go back shopping themselves, I know they’re in lockdown now but where they can do this themselves as well. Urm…

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Yeah. And I think, yeah, we’ve become more fluid as I say, we know what we’re doing now, urm… and people tend to just keep to their roles and just report back and on the actions that we’ve taken from the last meeting and, you know, moulded us know so we know what each other’s strengths are what each other’s not so good at and pull together to work with that.

**Interviewer:** Okay and how does the activity that you do in the group relate to other parts of your life? You’ve already mentioned some of this, for example how do you fit the things that you do in the group in the rest of your life?

**Participant:** There were times that, when I finished work, I did pick up the phone at start – at the beginning. Urm… that’s become less as I say when somebody’s off on holiday, or some people have or they say, \*interference 34:05\* we manage that, you know, I, I haven’t been well myself so again people are just picked up, run with it. Urm-

**Interviewer:** I cannot hear – yes, sorry [PARTICIPANT NAME].

**Participant:** Just think we know what we’re doing, does that make sense?

**Interviewer:** Yes, but urm, I will ask again to turn off the camera, the internet, I’m so sorry about this, I think the internet is not- okay, so I think it’s better this way, sorry. You were saying how do you fit everything in your life?

**Participant:** Urm as I say, for myself as I say when the weekends, the hotline went down at the weekends that that was helpful when we didn’t have to do that anymore. As I say I haven’t been well myself but urm, other people have carried on around me with doing that. Urm… yeah no, you do tend to - as I say some people work during the day in the management team some people aren’t working so again, we monitor and manage and we’ve got a volunteer team for the helpline that can manage those three hours, who are now very well versed in what they’re doing. We’ve got a team of dispatchers that’ve got – not, we’ve got a management structure that we have a volunteer telephone line overseer if you will, manager; I’ve got a urr a dispatch manager; I’ve got urr a volunteer manager; I’ve got an IT manager so they all manage that level and only does it come up to me. But I completely and utterly trust that middle level who actually manage it day-today, I don’t hear much about it at all on a day to day basis. At the beginning when we were setting it up – yes, but it runs so well, for me now it doesn’t impact that much upon my day-to-day. When I’ve got a meeting coming up or we’ve got something we need to do then yes. Or if there’s something we’re thinking about for the future, I have, this week for example, how we’re going to manage the Christmas holidays and how we’re going to manage expectations around that, and advertising that. Urm, then yes that’s a bit of input in that. But yes, at the the beginning it was a twenty-four hour, it was urr it was a yeah worked around my work with that. But now, as I say, I don’t really need to get that much involved in it, unless I need to, does that makes sense?

**Interviewer:** And in terms of emotional effort? Urm, it meant a lot for you, for others? You mentioned that in the beginning it was a lot of time, and in terms of emotional effort?

**Participant:** I think urm… because of the current role I do it wasn’t that bad for me. I know that when we had some of the safe guarding stuff come through the helpline, as I say the helpline managers I had to manage them when, but as I say there were minimal numbers of that. Urm… and then they got more responsible for that and urm, managed the emotional side of it, the emotional side of it I think it, I think it’s a weighing scales almost, you know. With six or seven of the calls maybe needing additional support to the three the 2,500 calls that we’ve had through where people have come back and fed back how positive it’s been, how they’ve been helped. Urm, when they wouldn’t know what to have done, had they not had us in the beginning, urm and seeing some of those empowering stories actually they’ve got back out there and and the feedback I think weighs against some of those difficult days. Urm… and I think again, the volunteers and the management committee, and the volunteers themselves feel that weighing as well. As I say in the – since March I may have made two phone calls to volunteers to say, “you know you’ve had a bit of tough volunteering call, how did it go, did you want to speak to me about it,” and yes, they were quite pleased about it. So I don’t think there was particular issue, I think it was helpful that I was able to use those skills as were some of my other colleagues who, on the management committee who, urm… my vice-chair who’s a [OCCUPATION 2] and urm… you know as I say my other colleague who’s a [OCCUPATION 3], my helpline manager, and bits of pieces who were able to to deal with that because that was there background as well, or have those skills. Urm… really really helpful.

**Interviewer:** Urm, and how about the motivations of other people to get involved. Especially active urr participants?

**Participant:** Urm, initially I knew that the … the motivation was there, people completely signed up for it, urr I think the only issues has been when we’ve called out sometimes. What we call our dispatch team have had difficulties getting through to some people. Whether that’s because we call out from a non-ID number, I’m not a hundred percent sure. Urr, but I like to think – and yes, you all flag at some points, but again, keeping everybody going, part of the motivation has been part of the role that I have had. Urm, as well as other people. And as I say we have a newsletter that goes out to volunteers now as well keeping them motivated, keeping them up to date with the lockdown changes and rules which is always interested to be motivated for. Urm, yeah, I think its urm… it hadn’t been, it’s an ongoing proves keeping everybody motivated. And particularly so going into the winter and urm not seeing any signs of that coming out and urm again, what’s going to be said this afternoon and what’s being said now. Yeah, what’s being said. Urm, and again, what’s the impact of that on [TOWN NAME]? You know we’re going to come out in tier one, tier two, tier three? How’s that going to be managed again and those kinds of things we’re continually looking at really.

**Interviewer:** Mmm, any more things that maybe you have done that have helped urr keep the group going?

**Participant:** Urm… the wish at the end that we could all meet each other her one day is something that I would really like to do in person. Urm… I think urm… keeping it going… as I say is urm… is just wanting to make sure that just everybody has, has what they need, I think there are expectations from you know, maybe some of the doctors and the pharmacists that we will continue to be as we are, but… as I say we have been an emergency stop gap and unless something very similar happens on the way down here, how we will resurrect, why we will resurrect I’m not a hundred percent sure. That’s not to say that we’re not closing, but we are looking at an endgame. Urm, because we’ve always looked at an endgame because we’ve had to do that.

**Interviewer:** So how do you see the future of this group in your vision?

**Participant:** I don’t think we’ll be, you know, particularly when the vaccines come out and people go back to that new normal one of the things I want to ensure is that urm… people feel confident enough to be able to resume their lives as they have done previously. Going to the shops, getting their prescriptions, feeling safe going to doctors that kind of thing. Urm… and not need to use us, if that makes sense. And in the background I know that we’ve got the [ORGANISATION NAME 2] organisation that has urm… we we, what we were particularly worried about at the beginning, although they’ve kind of branched off from us now, urm, to be a listening ear to there – and that in its own right will be a legacy to the work that we’ve done. Although its, as I say, a branch of ours because we did help them start up and raise their awareness and urm promote them to avoid some of the loneliness so I think that is a kind of legacy that we will have lasted, urm that we did fill a gap when it was needed and that the community came together urr from across the community. Urm, and I think that community spirit has been … I’ve always felt it in [TOWN NAME] but I think… yeah, people people did come together for that. Urm… yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay, urm, sorry?

**Participant:** Did that help?

**Interviewer:** Yes. Urm… urm, just going back to the motivations but… urr in your opinion what were the motivation to people to get involved in the first place urr in the mutual aid group. Urr why did they join as a volunteer?

**Participant:** Well I think it was people wanting to help their neighbour. Wanting to help their neighbour in a safe way. Wanting to – you know, but not knowing really how to do that. And as I say coming through us, urm, and with the publicity that we’ve done and the background and knowing some of the people that were there, made them feel more confident perhaps to go through that? Urm and, you know and…

**Interviewer:** And have people dropped out?

**Participant:** You’d like to think, wouldn’t you, that everybody wants to help their neighbour and that’s that was a good move. Urm… obviously, you know, you’re working in psychology and I work in what I do, and we know that that’s not always the case. But I think a lot of popular, yeah, want and again time, wanting to use their time. A lot of people had been furloughed a lot of people were you know, school teachers were off or not working as much, they wanted to full their time, urr this seemed and useful and in giving back to the community they could do something as I say in a safe manner.

**Interviewer:** What, do you mean, do you mean with safe manner?

**Participant:** Well that we had… a helpline, that we had the dispatch team that we had the… we had safeguarding on board we had the agreement of the Mayor and that everybody knew that we were one team and we were the ones in the town who were delivering that with the churches together, with the foodbank, you know we were working together as one, urm, as I say we were mainly doing the shopping and the prescription deliveries but we knew of other organisations around urm…

**Interviewer:** So, you were connected with other organisations?

**Participant:** We were connected, it was the community organisation that was doing that particular bit, we were connected into, into - yeah also making sure that you know we had callers from across Europe, we had callers from across the UK, because they’d seen about on Facebook or they’d heard about that they and you you know children had their elderly relatives in [TOWN NAME] who knew they couldn’t get out. Urm… how are we going – how are they going to manage that? Urm, so they were calling on our helpline. Urm, they were wanting to help and support. So yes, the motivation particularly in March and April I think was particularly high going into June and July as well we were still getting quite a lot of motivation there. I think it was only yeah, no I think motivation is still there for a lot of people.

**Interviewer:** Mmm, and have people drop out of your group?

**Participant:** From the Facebook group, no. From the volunteering availability, yes.

**Interviewer:** Why?

**Participant:** Urr I think that’s again personal circumstance, as I say some were teachers, some were… you know off work being furloughed have now gone back to work. Urr… or found different work. Urr some that were unable to shield and the shielding thing changed and yet maybe they’re had change in their own personal circumstances. I wouldn’t say a huge amount of people but a significant amount – you know, not a huge amount but I would say because of their own personal circumstances, I don’t think because they’ve stopped believing in the project.

**Interviewer:** Okay, any other problems that have affected the group, apart from the ones that you have already mentioned, urr for example organising problems, communications issues?

**Participant:** I think the only organising problem that we’ve had is how do we… how do we make- manage some of those things and practical stuff that needed to be sone. Urm… like the letter drop, like telephone line like the databases right at the beginning. You know, coming from a world where you and I would normally meet at a café or something like this, you know I’ve been on the University of Sussex site, you now, we’d go and have this conversation. None of us had hear of Zoom before, none of us had been in that situation and we didn’t know what we were facing with COVID. You know, we’re all meant to wear masks and stand two meters apart and isn’t this a weird world that we’re living in. Can we, you know, are we passing this on to older people, where are we going to with this, how are we going to set this up practically, but virtually practically. Urm, I think as I say using some of those skills and organisations that we got together and I must admit I’ve got a fantastic team around me, urr they were able to utilise their skills and their resources, as I say, initially the church hall was used for the leaflet drop and the lovely printers were able to help us arrange that. Urm… that kind of thing and the telephone line, how are we going to for that virtually? One of our team was able to source that through a specialist team so it’s’ all virtual apart from the person going our shopping or picking up the prescription and going around. Everything in the background is completely virtual which we wouldn’t have done before March. And having to learn that again, through that, urm… and learning to work that way I think was difficult, particularly with people you haven’t met before or known about. Urm, but it’s worked very well and again there is that community spirit there.

**Interviewer:** Umm… and any of the things that you mentioned that for example that helped the group to keep motivated, were any of this strategic? Did you have a plan?

**Participant:** … Did I have a plan? Urm…

**Interviewer:** Or was it just ad-hoc?

**Participant:** I think here’s been time we’ve all lacked motivation. I think there’s all been times that something hit us that we weren’t expecting. But as I say, the openness and honestly that we’ve had in the management team, as I say I brought forward on of my very good friend of mine who I’ve known long – much like a trouble-shooter, who has, when we’ve had a problem and she came on board in about June or July, and even before that maybe in May, and she urm and sometimes it’s been a full time job to troubleshoot down issues that were going on. Urm and… she’s been part of our management team as well but has helped smooth things out as well. So, we haven’t had that much urm… problem or issues come up. And again, motivation for us all, sometimes you’ve lost it, sometimes others have wanted a break or wanting to go away or have a holiday or haven’t been well themselves. The rest of us have just picked it up and run with it. And that’s the kind of team that I have around me. Urm… which I am, yeah which is amazing. Urm… so really that’s… but yes we have lost motivation at time we have lost you know, people haven’t been around that we’ve needed to reach out to but we’ve just carried on and … we’ve just carried on really.

**Interviewer:** Urr.

**Participant:** Full stop.

**Interviewer:** And finally, I want to ask about whether you have learnt anything from coordinating the group?

**Participant:** What have we learnt? We’ve learnt that we’re a resilient – I think the resilience. Urm, I think… the “we can do it” attitude. I think… understanding people and understanding circumstances again. Urm… and learning more about your community I think and how your community can work. Urr…what have I learnt, what have I learnt – yeah.

**Interviewer:** About local government perhaps?

**Participant:** Yeah, that we can do this on a local level, urm… and the vitalness of it I think, I would never have and I think that in my impression as well, that you… it’s very difficult to do… its very difficult, it was a very human thing that we did, it’s a very human thing that we do, but how virtually we can do that, at such a local level. Urm… although we did tap into our district council we did tap into as I say the networks that we knew and again in urm, we did have people that knew people that… you know and everybody actually came together because of the scale of what it was. It wasn’t like you could have a hundred people who would go down and pick up sandbags although if [TOWN NAME] was flooded again, yes I’m sure they would It was right we’re going to have to do this and, like again in April we didn’t know what we were walking into, but we walked and we carried on walking. And it think resilience of the team the way that we’ve adapted I think adaptation to the situation as its gone along to different type of lockdown rules to easing of lockdown, and recognising that you know, if I do come out or when I’ve had to go out or come out or seen people, you know we’ve had to be more… and very responsible about PPE and how do we get hold of PPE for our people how do we make sure that our data’s safe how doo we make sure that all of these background things that urm… you know safeguarding rules… urr yeah, I think that yeah I’ve been very very lucky in the people that I’ve had around me and the team that I’ve had around me.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean by, I mean to ask you, safeguarding roles?

**Participant:** Yeah if, urm… if urm… somebody called up, we’ve had a couple of regulars who’d call up and maybe got to the door and the volunteer said I’m a bit worried about the chap in, or you know, his food. Or somebody couldn’t go in, if they were concerned enough, you know, were the people coping, were they, was there a financial element there, were there issues there that, you know. Another case where a gentleman fell over and obvious wasn’t managing in his hope every well. So, but another person who actually we realised wasn’t managing his money very well so… urm we sort of – adult protection or want a better word, does that makes sense?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Participant:** So, we were mindful of those, you now, people in their own home who… maybe weren’t managing as well as they could have done. And and speaking to them and asking if they wanted specific help. And if they did then we make sure that they got help in there, urr as I say only about … five or six maybe in the time that I’m aware off.

**Interviewer:** Think you already answers all my questions, just have a final question, how do you see your role in the group in the future? You already mentioned how you see the group and how you see yourself in the group.

**Participant:** I don’t know how long our group in itself in its current format will run for, because it will run as I say from forty calls a day down to one or two calls a day, wanting to empower those to not require our help and support anymore, or find an alternative route for them. Urm... I think is the best possible option for us. I don’t want to completely urm… shelve our group per say or watch with what we’ve achieved in the last nine – eight/nine months together. Urm but I do know that people are fatigued, and I know that we can’t carry on forever. And, and having the Facebook group there and the way it’s called [NAME OF FACEBOOK GROUP, it was never meant to be a COVID response team it just took on that role. Urm, the next… issue comes down I mean it could just be the flooding again it could just be – whatever. I mean it will still be there in its own right urm but we’ll have that legacy, we’ll have that. And and that [TOWN NAME] can do this, I think that will be the thing that I want people to take away from you know, the clients who’ve maybe felt that they’ve been supported by other [INHABITANTS OF TOWN] and the other volunteers that went out and did – that actually they contributed their part. And that we were all part of something an awful lot bigger than what it was. I just came up with an idea and people around me took that and you know, as I say, together I’ve been very lucky that we’ve done that, very lucky with the… the team that we’ve had and we’ll just keep in the background until we’re needed again really. And I think using our skills, the skill set that we had for this particular crisis was quite a - I was extremely lucky. We were extremely lucky and business in the town that we supported them. You know and and making sure that they were being used as well and they were able to help us. Urm I think… you realise the community spirit is the one thing that I will take away from this.

**Interviewer:** Okay –

**Participant:** Even if that done virtually.

**Interviewer:** You mention several times skills were any particular skills that you see as more important that people in the group have?

**Participant:** IT skills.

**Interviewer:** IT, okay.

**Participant:** Urm, urm, for me IT skills, urm… for me some of the networking skills that people had, urm and were able to sue that. Urm… other people might say, yes, they were pleased that I could bring some of those… my you know, people and how to make the safety issues around that. Urm, yeah, I think the IT skills and actually skills around… what I’d I I call it earlier on, the problem solver. Urr and I know that particularly when I wasn’t here when I wasn’t on the ground here, having, you know, having someone who was able to go out and do some of those things was really important. Urm, I think people skills and just being empathetic and having those IT skills and yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay, well thank you, I do not have any more questions.

**Participant:** Yeah, I don’t know really, networking as well.

**Interviewer:** Networking.

**Participant:** Urr yeah.

**Interviewer:** Is there anything you like to add?

**Participant:** What’s going to, I mean you say you’re the university, from a psychological point of view I think one of the most important things that we’ve done in our group is play from the listening sidefrom the emotional side it’s how people, when you mentioned the word like “lockdown” the isolation that people felt and there were, you know people did feel the isolation the worried about how they were going to get their shopping, how they were going to get their prescriptions. And I think we helped with that and helping alongside [ORGANISATION NAME 2] we hope that we’ve increased people’s feelings of less isolation. But what’s your view, what’s, what’s the initial, yeah, what are the finding and what’s your initial point of view on some of those findings, where are you initially going to go with some of this research, is this research to be published, what’s what’s you role within in that?

**[Debriefing]**

**[End of Interview]**