**Date: 18/12/2020**

**Duration:** 59:46

**Interviewer:** \*Project Introduction\*

My first question is if you can tell me the name of your group?

**Participant:** Urm… I can do, I can do it from the basis of one because I actually, I actually run two.

**Interviewer:** Two, okay.

**Participant:** So, I’ve got the, it’s the [GROUP NAME 1].

**Interviewer:** Okay, and the other?

**Participant:** It is the [GROUP NAME 2]. So, the latter, is a group that already existed, we do things in the community anyway, urm, so we’ve been doing that for five years. The COVID one is the, a slightly different area but that was set up in March, just before the first lockdown.

**Interviewer:** How did it start, that group?

**Participant:** That that, the COVID group, it actually started from… a central person – one person in the town who decided to put something on Facebook and split the different areas of the town up into the different villages, you know, the different areas or so, ours being [VILLAGE NAME]. And ask for, ask for admin people to – or coordinators, coordinators to coordinate the volunteers to assist the community. Given that at the time we didn’t know what was coming, because of COVID. We knew that there was going to be, yeah difficult, yeah. So, it was like one person asking for, or setting, they set up an admin group for people who wanted to help and support with communities, and then offered, and then split them off into then, urm the smaller areas and then, people then jumped on. So, in my area, myself and [COORDINATOR NAME], the, the other coordinator, jumped in this area. I, as I say, I also coordinate another, the other area as well, or help coordinate the other area.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so-

**Participant:** We do regular meetings, not so much now, but all the coordinators for all the different groups, then have one meeting with the coordinator, albeit virtual.

**Interviewer:** How often?

**Participant:** So, we share the best practice that we’ve gone through.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and how often have you done that?

**Participant:** Urm, we’ve probably had urm, six, six all together, so probably, you know, every couple, you know, initially it was like, I think we had, every fortnight, but urm for the first few weeks to get things up and running. But then we probably had two in the last three months, if that.

**Interviewer:** Urm what was the aim of the group when it started.

**Participant:** So, our, the aim of the group was to, urm, help anybody, any member of the community who fell through the cracks from all the other services and support that was offered by local authority. So, if they, you know, if they, you know, they didn’t help with having help, you know, care in the community, you know, the community services from the local authority, then we would be there to help them shop or, you know, if they were isolating or staying in or shielding at times, so we would go and do the shopping for them. Or to help with application forms for different things. So, I’ve done disabled badges, urm for people, because they’re, some of the people are not, urr computer literate so it’s not very good to say, “go and do it, fill in a form online.”

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Participant:** So, like, you go and do it and take their picture with your camera and be able to do it for them. A bit of dog, I think some of the other volunteers have done dog walking, but we’ve made sure that you know, the coordinators have managed the volunteers, you know, in the community. So, you now? That was, that was the aim to try and be there, be there and help with whatever way we can, shopping, paying bills, and you know, just being there so people can remain safe.

**Interviewer:** And has anything changed since the group start?

**Participant:** Urm I think we, we managed to get, urm, so I think initially it was all about the volunteers, the volunteers, just having enough people to cope with the urm any demand. So, it was a a difficult, it was a difficult, it was an unknown demand. Because we didn’t know how many people would need help outside of the other, the other urm, the other methods of help available. Urm so, whilst we were managing the volunteers, we’ve also then gone off and done other things such as, urr apply, like get grant funding, so we’ve applied for grants from various organisations. You know, things like urm, there’s lots of schemes, there’s been a few schemes in [COUNTRY NAME] but there has been some national ones.

Urm so from what, for the one group you know I’ve managed to, I’ve got a National Lottery grant for the other, for the other group that already existed. But we used that to be able to provide things to the community. So, I’ve actually, I’ve actually got, we’ve got about a hundred and forty Christmas presents to go out… for, so about eighty tomore elderly residents, so they’ve got like a box of biscuits that we’ve had, managed to get funding for and donated. And we’ve got chocolates and sweets for kids, which we’ll go out and deliver, so that they have something. But that’s all been doe through like seeking funding for urr doing these things.

We’ve helped the local school, so somebody urm, one area, one areas that is the catchment area for the children for the school, is one of the more socially deprived areas in the the UK. Urm, so whilst schools returned in September and the children returned, they didn’t, they all had to have their own pens and pencils, and of course not everyone can afford, there was some, some children who do come to school with nothing. So, we produced, we managed to, again we got, with some of the funding we got we bought pencil cases full of pencils and pens, so that the head teacher could give them out discreetly. But so that they would have something that they could use.

**Interviewer:** Okay, you mentioned a couple of resources, you had funds, did you have anything else that helped the group?

**Participant:** Urm, what we did is urm… urr we, the one group we invested, urm, so the, the one, the group, the COVID one that was set up in March, we invested, had some initial funding, we invested in a central phone number so we could then publicise that and we did leaflets to every household, that if you need support, whatever, we can help, we think we can help, whatever, we’ll do our best. Urm but that was a central number that then, we didn’t have to give out personal numbers, but we could publicise that, and then we had urm, a priority order, so we have a retired lady that was happy to be the first contact. So, that, they, they ring the central number and between nine and six everyday, if someone rings that number, she generally is the one who answers it. And then she can then pass the information on to myself or [COODINATOR NAME 1] is the other coordinator. But if she isn’t available to answer it would go to us. So, we have that kind of resource available. So minimal cost, because you pay really on the number of phone calls that you receive and everything. Urm but we did that because we don’t have, we don’t have an online presence.

**Interviewer:** You don’t.

**Participant:** Like social media.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** And things because, it wasn’t, because it was only set up in March, the group wasn’t established. The other group that I’m involved in, because we’ve been doing things in the community for five years, people know what we do, they know that we support the community and we do things to urm, you know, we do events normally in the community and of course that all had to stop. But we’ve done similar things like, afternoon teas we’ve delivered to people and that type of thing. And it’s all, you know, but, but we its slightly different groups as I say, there’s, other than me there’s different sets of people running, like involved in the two groups. I’m the only one who’s common, so between the two.

**Interviewer:** So, you have urm, experience in organising groups like this?

**Participant:** Yes, yes because I’m, yeah so, I’ve been part of a group, well, because I’m, I’m, urr [ELECTED POSITION 1], I’m a [ELECTED POSITION 1], so I’m an elected urm… [ELECTED POSITION 1] then for my area. Urm so I’m actually, I’m actually becoming [ELECTED POSITION 2].

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** So, it’s sort of, so yeah, I’ve been involved in things, probably only for about three, three years, three and half years, since I moved to this area, but urm, yeah so, I’ve got, we do a lot of things in the community anyway as a community council. Urm, but this above and beyond this is local, you know, local support with just volunteers who are, want to help with COVID. And the number of volunteers, has been quite key to being able to do things, because two people can’t do everything. You know, so we’ve delivered leaflets to two thousand households, you know, more than once. We’ve done it, you know, in the beginning, we cannot, we couldn’t not do that without volunteers.

**Interviewer:** And how many volunteers do you have?

**Participant:** Urm probably about urm between a dozen and two dozen. That can do various different things, so some have been available more than others. Urm initially probably a lot of them were available because everybody was off work or locked down, if they couldn’t work from home, they were effectively at home doing nothing, so they were, there were a lot more available, Urm, once people started to return to work, they become less available, but then the need has become less available if that makes sense? We haven’t had the need to do shopping for people because of course, some of those people have been able to go out to do it themselves.

**Interviewer:** And were any particular skills in the volunteers that were important for the group?

**Participant:** Urm, \*laughs\*, urr I think, from a skill, from a requirement we made sure they were all urm the, what’s it called the D, the, the baring service, the DBS checks, all those things, so every one of them met with the volunteers, we wouldn’t, we wouldn’t allow any of the volunteers to go out without having those checks done on them, so, again the local authority helped with that with those that didn’t already have those checks done. And they, they paid for a lot of those in that case. Urm I think other than, probably from the coordinators side is more organisation and stuff, you know? It’s, it’s being able to try and plan, but that’s been difficult, we don’t know what we need, you know, sometimes we don’t know what we needed.

And that’s why the calls with the other volunteer groups have been very key, you know, in the first three of four months because we, every area is slightly different in what they need. So, we, you know, my, the area that I, that I’m on, we didn’t have a massive need for people doing shopping, like to have shopping done for them, we think we’ve probably had two or three. In the, since March. Whereas the other group that I’m involved with, that I have run, which is only the adjacent area. We’ve been doing shopping for at least half a dozen people, and one of those people we were doing the shopping at least twice a week, till urr October this year, because the need was greater. So, for the volunteer side it’s been more a case of urm, just being able to be there. We’ve had people ringing on the phones, so some of them, we, we, we had a mix of volunteers and doing the different, and using their different skills, so some of them didn’t want to go out and do the shopping, but they were, they’re quite chatty people, and like to talk to people, so they were the ones that we used for the telephone calls, the buddy, the buddying up, so you now, if somebody is on their own and they needed just a weekly phone call to check they were okay and have a weekly phone call for ten minutes. So, we got quite a few people who were willing to do that, so that’s just, the communication skills then, of being able to talk to people.

**Interviewer:** So, you did shopping, urm… the phone line, what else?

**Participant:** Yeah, we did shopping, phone, phoning people, urm we’d done a system with application forms, we’ve distributed, we’ve organised collections for, the foodbank, so the local foodbank. Urm, we’ve just done the last on of this year now, we’ve done over the last two, two weekends. So again, we delivered leaflets to all houses to say we’re going to collect, and over and again, the volunteers have been key in being able to, like pick up all of those donations because, you know, we haven’t got a central location where we can drop them off, urm, so we’ve had to say like, “right put them, on these, on these dates, put these items on your walls, you know, your front walls, your doorsteps, in bags and we will have volunteers that will pick them up.” So, we’ve had so much that we’ve, I’ve had to borrow my next-door neighbours van, to deliver it to the actual foodbank, because it’s so much, and that’s over two weekends. It’s over a metric tonne of food in, over the last week that we’ve that we’ve had donated, but it helps the foodbank, because they’ve seen an increase in the number of recipients. So again, the foodbank is based, literally less than a mile away, where they distribute all the parcels from, so they’re very grateful for that. So, we’ve done the foodbank.

We’ve done, we’ve done, urr activity packs for those people on their own, those are the more, the more, the elderly that are on their own, we done activity packs I the summer. We’ve done activity packs for children.

**Interviewer:** Also, in the summer? Okay.

**Participant:** Yeah, so we’ve done like puzzle books, and again this is something we’ve done, all the groups we’ve been involved in we’ve done similar things like this. We’ve done pamper packs for about two hundred people, we’ve done afternoon tea boxes, for, in the one group we’ve done afternoon tea. So again, we’ve made it all up with scone, the jam, you know, and everything, and with tea bag, coffee sachet, and we’ve delivered that. We’ve just done, in the one group we’ve done two nights where we’ve had Santa in his sleigh through the streets, where we’ve done, so we’ve had a thousand bags of sweets and presents for children. Urm that’s been this week. Urm we’ve got selection boxes, as I say a hundred and six, a hundred and forty presents going out join this in this area now where I am, where I live, we’ve got a hundred and forty boxes and biscuits and selection boxes being delivered this week. Urm, to those people, so yeah, a few things.

**Interviewer:** Urm, how often do you do those things?

**Participant:** Urm, probably at least something every month, easily. Probably between the two groups I’m involved in, every month there’s been something we’ve done since March.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and in the COVID group so you feel that anything have changed sine it started?

**Participant:** Urm, I think now, there’s less, there’s, if I’m being honest there’s less, on the one group, on the COVID group, there’s less reliance on us for anything. We don’t get, even though we’ve still got this phone number, we do not get that many phone calls through that at all. Urm, we don’t have that many people that need shop, as I say, we’ve probably had one, one or two in the last three months, of people who need shopping because they’ve got, isolating. So, the need for people contacted us has diminished. But we are still trying to do things with some of the funding to show the people, the people in the community that we are still there if they need something. And giving them something to put a smile on their faces and everything, because there are a lot of people who are on their own. There are children who haven’t been able to, you know, be in school or see their friends, or, you know, this years been, you know, obviously quite bad for everyone. Urm but it’s just trying to, you know, support so I think we’ve got more of a, a, urm, reacting to what people need to try and do things for the community instead. You know, rather than being reactive, we’re a bit more, we’re probably more proactive in saying, we’ll do this, we’ll try and get some funding and we’ll do this for this group of people in the community.

**Interviewer:** Okay can you tell me a little bit more about why did you get involved in the COVID group?

**Participant:** Urm…\*laughs\*, because I get involved in everything now, \*laughs\*. So, so because I’m a [ELECTED POSITION 1] as well, we’ve had, you know, so I guess we’ve, three years of it, you know, we have, I live, I live in a, in an estate of about seventy-nine houses, urm which was brand new five years ago, five years ago today actually, that we moved. Urm, but that, this estate had a community, sorry resident’s association already set-up. because they needed, the did it to fight some planning application on nearby land. So even through this was quite a new housing development, they needed, they had a resident’s association set up. So, when we moved here, basically I became a member of the committee and doing the resident’s association. So, a lot of it started from there, so that started with the seventy-nine houses and then I was asked if I would consider being the [ELECTED POSITION 1]. So, I got involved in that and then I got involved in some of the other groups and things that are around, so the Neighbourhood Watch, urm, the other community group that already existed in the adjacent area.

Urm, so yeah, it’s just, I kind of, its evolved from being part of, keeping something going on a very small group of people on a residential estate to going wider and helping as many people in the community as you can with, and making sure that it’s the best place to like. Like I guess that’s the thing we would strive for, you know, that we want to make it, you know, the community, you now, friendly, you now, nice to, you know, everybody, you now, in my opinion, kind of the old fashioned, like from years ago, like when people know each other and look after each other. Because that’s very much what we’ve got going on here. If anything happened. Urm, you know, if I was in, had an accident or anything like that, or, you know COVID is one example, its when I was in with COVID in March, everybody around me, neighbours and friends around me, you know, because we’ve got that network, everybody just helps each other. And it’s just, and it’s, you know there are people in the community, urm, you know, they just want to help, and that’s what we want to do, and provide things for people, that just don’t have any were to go. You know, so we, like I say we, that was the purpose of the, of the the group that was already established, the community group that was already established. Is that there are, because of the social deprivation and there’s a lot of people who live on their own and are more urr, more senior in age. Urm and the only place they have, is, to go, or to do is when we put something on as a community, as an event. So, we do big, we would normally be doing bingo every week in the community centre, and that is, for some people, that is the only time they go out and socialise with anybody. So, there’s that and, you know, just the smallest, it’s the small things of helping people like that, that make, that make me do more. Yeah, not too much in some cases, I probably should stop doing some of the stuff but –

**Interviewer:** So how does, sorry?

**Participant:** Sorry my, my wife tells me I do too much but, \*laughs\*

**Interviewer:** So, my, the following question is related with that, so how does the activity that you do in the group relates with to the parts of your life?

**Participant:** Urm… well so, so I think one thing that helps me is I work from, I work predominately – sorry, let me just rephrase that, I, I have a job in [INDUSTRY], but that sees me, my office is my house, my office is my home. Even though I work for a company, I love two and half hours away from the office in [COUNTRY NAME], in in [TOWN NAME 1]. So, but my, my interaction and mainly my role is mainly with external customers, and to do that is usually virtually anyway, or I will go to those customers, and that’s like globally, that could be anywhere in the world. Urm, so a lot of my time, so when I’m, a lot of, the stuff I can do as a volunteer and the things I do, is because I, you know, probably pre-COVID I’m probably eighty percent of the I time at home anyway. So, I can finish at five o’clock, five thirty and I can go and help run… the community centre and do the bingo session because I am home. I don’t have an hour’s community from an office somewhere and then, and that type of thing. Urm so that, that helps facilitate, urm being able to do some of the things, as well as being, you know, my children are older as well, they’re teenagers, so they don’t tend to want anything unless the internet isn’t working, or they need feeding. So, that’s the only time they ask me for anything. So, they, they, they look after themselves, you know, and everything. So, they’re, they’re, they’re doing their own thing and everything. My wife’s a [OCCUPATION] as well, so we’re, you know, we’re kind of used to, you know, she’s used to me being away or doing things as well so it kind of fits in, she says I do too much. But, you know, I’m very much a thinker, I worry, you know, I’d say from a psychological point of view, and a mental point of view, I suffer with my mental health and I have in the past – you know I have - I don’t mind saying this to anyone, I had a breakdown urr seven years, seven and half years ago, urm… I cope, I cope with things better when I’m busy, not thinking.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, I understand that.

**Participant:** So, sometimes tits, it’s a very difficult balance. I’ll be honest, in terms of, you know, because there’s so many things sometimes that’s too much, urm to try and get done. Urm but, you know, that, it’s the way I deal with it, I suppose, is, is I with, you know, I’d, you know, instead of sitting there thinking about things, I’m already thinking of something else, or we’re doing something else or I’m thinking ahead and planning. You know, that’s the way my brain, brain functions really, it’s sort of… next thing. So, you know, we’re already thinking about January. You know, I’m already thinking about January. We’ve got, you know, of the community, again for one pf the groups we’ve got a… we’ve got some funding that is just come, is going to be coming in in the next couple of weeks that we’ve been awarded, but we’ve got to spend that money by the end of March. So, we’re already planning, you know, okay, well, I’m, I’m, I’m the treasurer of that group, so I, I need to make sure that the money is accounted for and spent kind of thing by that date. Urm but that involves making sure and ushing people along a bit, and saying, you know, we need to plan these things in. Which is again, very difficult.

**Interviewer:** And what was your role in the COVID group?

**Participant:** My role? Urm coordinator, urm doing, my, my main, as I say, probably my main role is joint coordinator with [COORDINATOR NAME], who was also on e-mail that you sent. Urm, urr because I know she’ll do an interview after Christmas and everything. So, [COORDINATOR NAME] and I live in the same area, we’re a few streets away. Urm [COORDINATOR NAME] and I work urm… we, we, we actually sit on the community to run the community centre. We also urr run the Neighbourhood Watch together, so I’m, I’m, I’m the vice chair, urm, and she’s the secretary. So, we do things in the community together anyway together, urr for a lot of things. So that’s how we know each other. Urm, so both of us are coordination, but we also do a lot of the doing as well. So, if we’re, and you know, if we, we, we, we, between us, we both apply for the grant funding and any money is available, urm, we were the ones who plan, plan the things that we’re going to do, as the coordinators. Urm, but we get out hands dirty and do it, you know, we’re the ones that, as I say, out of the hundred and forty presents that we’ve got, well it’s like [COORDINATOR NAME]’s bought everything, I’ll be going out and delivering some of those presents, you know, that we’ve got. Same thing for the school stuff, I purchased all the things for the school. So, we generally do everything, everything we can, as well as being, you know, it’s coordinating everything. We do the volunteer bit and doing everything as well as coordinating everything as well.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Keeping things running.

**Interviewer:** Where did you get the volunteers? How, how did you get the volunteers?

**Participant:** Urm Facebook.

**Interviewer:** Facebook, so you have a Facebook?

**Participant:** So, on Facebook. Urm… so we’ve, there was two, mainly two things, there was Facebook and local authority. Urm because the local authority council did urm, offered volunteers as well. So, there was, and a, and a, and a… urr a third sector, urr a third sector organisation that works in communities as well, in the area. They also had a list of volunteers that had come forward. So those lists were, those that we got asking to help on Facebook, those that came from the local authority that were in this area. Because again we had, remember we had all these different groups in different areas in the town. So, they were all passed into various, the names were passed to the various coordinators. We then have a list of volunteers there. So, some of them were duplicated because they’d gone on different, they’d gone on Facebook and they’d gone to the local authority as well. But we then ended up with a list of, as I say, probably about twenty-five volunteers at the peak. Urm, so less now because some of those are now back in work so they can’t spend the time doing those things that they were. But year we had a list of, yeah, mainly social media is the biggest. As always, these days, social media is the biggest form of communication.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and how do you coordinate everything?

**Participant:** Urr do I coordinate everything? No, I would say [COORDINATOR NAME] coordinates more, more of the group stuff. But, but, but the COVID group, she coordinates more of it than I do. Urm, I probably, for the other group I’m involved in, I probably coordinate fifty-fifty with urm, one of the other members.

**Interviewer:** But for example, urm, how did you know that people needed help, how did you get access to them?

**Participant:** Urm that was mainly, for us, it was mainly through our leaflets, so because we did the leaflets out to every household, we printed leaflets we got volunteers to deliver them to every household had the leaflet so we’re talking about over two thousand people overall. Urm, everyone of those houses had a leaflet delivered, with our contacts, the e-mail address, the contact details of our central number, urm the name, my name, I mean I’m not - as I say I’m the [ELECTED POSITION 1], but my name was on there in terms of, so they knew there was somebody, and the fact I was the [ELECTED POSITION 1], so they knew that I was there, that it was legitimate then. But yeah, anything that came in from there and the, the rest had been word of mouth and social media, it’s just share it. People sharing our social media, posting, urm, people then inviting other people to join up, join the group then. So yeah probably, we don’t have anybody joining the group these days, on Facebook, but in the beginning I mean we’ve got several hundred, I think it’s a few hundred members.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** That are and, and, you know, join the group for his area and then of course, we were, in the initial you know few months, we were posting our, a lot of the advice, you know from the public health authority, on you know, on what to do, symptoms, that kind of thing. We were just trying to push the advice out for everyone as much as we could. But that’s how we also got people coming to us saying, “what about this?” or “somebody needs support,” so they would, they’d contact us directly, either because they’ve had a leaflet, or like yourself. I mean obviously you’ve got, you’ve got our details from, I’m not sure where you’ve got our details from, but you’ve got it.

**Interviewer:** The internet, yes.

**Participant:** Yes, you’ve obviously found out details, urm, but we’ve had, we’ve actually had people who live in different parts of the country, contact us because they have a member of their family who lives in this, lives in the area. And so even thought a member, the member, the member of family doesn’t actually go on social media, or anything, or hasn’t, they haven’t come to us, we’ve been asked to do something for those people. Because they’re somewhere else in the country, but they said, “can you do this?” or, you know, “can you ring them?” or, you know, “are you able to do their shopping?” so we’ve had quite a few people who, you know, through the social media bit, they’ve seen the groups from that and then have contacted up to help somebody who is in the area.

**Interviewer:** And what specific area has the group covered?

**Participant:** So, for us, urm, urr so for the [GROUP NAME 1], that would be, generally the postcode [POSTCODE]. Which is probably the easiest thing to go off. Generally, [POSTCODE] is all of the [VILLAGE NAME] area. Urr so, you know, small, small section of the town urm, because there’s [TOWN NAME 1] is quite a large town where were based. Which is why, like I say, that’s why I’m a councillor on the town council for [TOWN NAME 2], so there’s, you know, there must be at least eight, at least eight different other groups in the town. Urm that are, you know, they would all be on Facebook as well. Urm, you know, so, so yeah, so we concentrate on that area and of course I mean, the other group that I’m involved in, you know, is the next area along to me, you know, because their backed, back, back-to-back, so there’s a bit of an overlap in the middle. The same as me, so in terms of people, just the way that – I think generally it’s done on the political, the political boundaries of elect, of the areas. You know, [VILLAGE NAME], when we say [VILLAGE NAME], we generally cover the political area. Urm… but that actually encompasses some of the area that is adjacent because of the way they draw, they draw, they draw the boundaries weirdly.

**Interviewer:** Urm so the group, you mentioned a couple of times, is the group in contact with other groups locally?

**Participant:** Yeah absolutely, definitely. So, we, so we have, on Facebook we have our own groups, which are for the members of the public can join and urm we share the information on there. But all of the coordinators, and the ad, the ad, the admin people on the groups, we have our own group on Facebook as well. So, we share, we share information on the admin groups so they can push out information to their, their own groups, to the public as well, so the communities their in. So, we, and that’s why we had the phone calls, the kind of virtual phone calls, the Zoom calls. We had the rum, I say there was half a dozen of those where we said, “well what’s going on in your area, what are we doing?” because there’s differences, there is differences, you know? Initially we, it was like how do we, we’re not supposed to have contact with people, but if you’re doing shopping for people how do you deal with the money? And sharing, you know, what people have done, because you know, they need to do risk assessments and things. And you know, the purpose of having that contact is to share experience, share skills I guess, in terms of you know, everybody’s got a role, they’ve got a different day job, you know, they’ve got different skills and different industries and professions. So, mine is more the [OCCUPATIONAL BACKGROUND], urm, because that’s where I work in [SECTOR]. But of course, a lot of the, the challenges we’ve had is technology. People, you know, have suddenly had to go from meeting in person, you know, things like the Neighbourhood Watch, those types of groups, they’ve all had to go virtual. But a, of course a lot of these people have never used tools before, for me its day-to-day, is what I do, its what I do, because I’m meeting with people across the world virtually anyways, but these people have never used them. So, it’s that but, but you know, other people have got experience in doing risk assessments, so again, before we sent volunteers out, we’ve shared the, one, one of the groups – or actually I think [COORDINATOR NAME] did the risk assessment document that was then shared with all the other groups. So rather than everybody trying to do their own thing, urm… you know, and duplicate things, we’ve shared, where we can, those items and then we’ve reused them.

**Interviewer:** Okay, urm, and how is the, the relationship, well the relationship with the local council?

**Participant:** The local council? Very good I would say. So, so we’ve got, with the, with the community council, yeah. I’m going to say that because I’m the [ELECTED POSITION 1], one of the [ELECTED POSITION 1] anyway. And, in the other, the other group I run I run now with two other [ELECTED POSITION 1] and the local authority councillor as well. So, you know the two, the groups are… urr so from that point of view we have a lot of input and support from the, because we are [ELECTED POSITION 1], as well. So that, that helps in that sense, so when we’ve had to… urm, you know we can get, we can get information or we can get assistance from – you can’t do everything, is the thing, the, there’s a certain… urr, you can probably appreciate, that whilst we’ve gone out and said, “you can contact us for things,” there are certain things we cannot deal with as volunteers. They need to begoing to social services or, it needs to be pushed to the local authority to assist the people as well for their wellbeing or their healthcare. We can’t do that, we’re not doctors we’re not nurses and all that. So, if they needed help in that capacity, the local authorities and the councils have been great. Because we, because we have a link into them, we can then get to the right people and refer - and get them the help they need. So, from that point of view, that the, you know, the councils have been great.

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

**Participant:** No.

**Interviewer:** No.

**Participant:** Neither group, no.

**Interviewer:** And has your group tried to get official recognition?

**Participant:** No, \*laughs\* not official, no.

**Interviewer:** No, becoming a charity or a company?

**Participant:** No, no, no, so both groups that I’m involved in, they’re not registered charities or anything like that, but you know, we just do what we do because we want to help the community.

**Interviewer:** So, you don’t think, it’s not necessary for what you do?

**Participant:** No. I think the only, urr, from… a grant, obtaining funding and grant perspective, urm… I’m trying to think, I don’t think we’ve been limited to being able to apply for funding even though we’re not a registered charity for example. All the funding that has been offered by different institutions and organisations, they’ve been… urm they generally accept grants from community groups or volunteer groups, provided that group is managed… appropriately with a constitution, of set up and how those funds are managed. I think that’s the key thing. So, with, and that was one of the things, and here’s a good point, so the, the existing community group that I’m part of, because that was already set up five years ago, we have a proper bank, we have a bank account, I’m the treasurer. So, we have to, we do the accounts and everything like that. With the COVID group that we set up, which, to help this specific area, that was a new group, so we have no constitution, we have no – it was purely a volunteer group. So, in order to get funding for that, we are, we have utilised the Neighbourhood Watch group – that is a properly formed group, which is registered with the Neighbourhood Watch - urm, to use their bank accounts to, for the funds to be accounted for and brought through. So that’s the, that’s probably been the, you know, so in that sense it would make it easier if there was some, there was a way of registering voluntary groups… from a national level, because we did, we didn’t have, we would never have been able to set up a bank account quickly, and none of the other groups that were formed, you know – I say fortunately in the wone area we managed, we utilised, we managed to utilise existing groups. And that’s what a lot of these groups have done, where they’ve got money from funding from sources, they’ve, they’ve utilised existing groups in that community for the funding to be paid into. Otherwise, they wouldn’t have been able to get funding, because it has to go into a bank account and, you know, clearly, it’s not going to go into a personal bank account. Urm so that’s, that’s probably – but getting, as long as you’ve got that bit, its haven’t been a, not being registered or, you know, nationally, has not been a problem.

**Interviewer:** Urm, you mention, or you talk about your own motivations to get involved, urm but in your opinions what are the motivations for other active participants, why did they get involved?

**Participant:** Urm, I think, so if we talk about the COVID more, urm and why people have got involved in COVID. So, urm… in February this year this town, the town that we live in got hit by flooding, severe flooding, urm we were on the news, national news you might remember it, in South [COUNTRY NAME] it was all over the news in February. So urm, we were, from, like impacted heavily by flooding and through that a lot of the communities which were affected by flooding, including mine, you know, there were people who came together and were helping others in that. And I think that is what stuck, you know that is what made it very, very easy to, for people to, for volunteers to come forward when the COVID pandemic started. In that people wanted to help the other people who weren’t able to, you know, needed that support. Because a lot of people had just done, they’d seen a lot of things happening in the community for the flooding in February and then the next, a month later, we’ve now got COVID coming. People wanted to help where they could. Urm, you know, so I think the motivation was just that, the ability to be there in the community and help other people. If, yeah, because there was a real, I guess a real need, potential that anybody could need help from somebody in the next six months. You know, nobody knew what was hap – what was going to happen. Urm… you know, so, so any, I think the motivations of a lot of our volunteers was they might be the ones who need, who need help themselves, so while they can they can help. And we have had that with volunteers of course, where they’d been able to volunteer but then they’ve been ill, like myself, urm where we weren’t, we weren’t able to do anything for a shot period of time because we were, we were affected. But of course, while we were affected, we knew there were people, there were other people who were helping us when we needed it. So, people doing shopping for me, you know, when I was ill and my wife had to stay in, we had people, people did the shopping for me. So, so you know, I think it’s just that helping, you know, the fact that they knew that people needed help, they, they knew that they needed help and they needed a couple of our volunteers around the corner from me, they’ve actually tested positive in the last week, so again, we’ve all then said, “right, well what do you need? If you need shopping just get in touch, urm, and we’ll sort it out.”

**Interviewer:** Okay, and has involvement in the group meant a lot of effort and time for you?

**Participant:** \*Laughs\* Urm, yes. Urm…

**Interviewer:** And for the others as well?

**Participant:** I’d say it’s probably, easily, easily a couple of hours a week, you know, on average. In the beginning, not so much now, I think its kind of, yeah, evened out now, but I think initially, probably a lot more time, a lot of time I think probably worse for me, in that sense, because I’m dealing with other things as well, so I’m still [ELECTED POSITION 1], I’m still, you know, doing, doing the other group as well. There’s two groups so of course there’s time for both, both of those. So, for me, probably, easily several hours a week are coming volunteer activities and running groups, things like that.

**Interviewer:** Have people drop out of your group?

**Participant:** Urm, the other, only, only some volunteers because they’ve returned to work. In terms of the organisations and coordinators, no. everybody is still there from day one.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** It’s the same, it’s the same, it’s the same people. I would say, yeah same people that stepped forward and said, “yeah I’m happy to help coordinate these things.” They are the same people who are there now. Urm, and they will, they will carry on, you know, I’m sure, I’m sure they will carry on there as long as they’re needed.

**Interviewer:** Okay, any problems that have affected the group?

**Participant:** …Urm, \*laughs\*. I don’t think, I don’t think there’s been any problems, I think we’ve always had, you know, sufficient resources and volunteers. Like any time, we’ve needed to do something. Urm, you know, I think we’ve, yeah. I don’t think we’ve struggled with anything. Urm, I think that, the early, again it was probably the early part was… working out what we could and couldn’t do. As in how you do it, you know, and do it because the regulations were changing, the rules were changing. Urm we needed guidance from, you know, like I say, from a health and safety perspective. And that’s what one of the third part- third sector groups did in, they, they, they helped coordinate some of that, and they provided the information to the public, and it call helped because we had flooding the month before, so a lot of people had had to do a lot of this stuff already. They’d had to coordinate these things and suddenly, out of nothing, groups were formed and helped people in certain areas. Dealing, dealing with cleaning up and things like that for flooding, and now they’ve moved on to-. So, a lot of the people involved in COVID were people who helped during flood, during the flooding. But, other than that, I think, you know, the biggest, the biggest probable thing, difficulty has been the communication. Because nobody can meet face-to-face. Yeah, that’s probably the hardest thing we’ve struggled with is getting people, urm, so we’ve had, I think we had two volunteer calls for the one group. And… because of, again technology. People are working, urm… we’ve managed to get I think two volunteers to join the coordinators on a group, on a call. Because like this, because people don’t have the experience of using Zoom or whatever in their day jobs. So, they can’t, they don’t want, they either don’t want to, they can’t, they don’t have the equipment, they – whatever it is, they don’t even. So, a lot of the things have been done through e-mail, our volunteers, or or messaging them.

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

**Participant:** Urm… I think, I would say [COORDINATOR NAME]. [COORDINATOR NAME] as the other coordinator, has been very good at seeing out update emails to everybody, all the volunteers on our list. She’s done a very, very good job of sending out e-mails probably, easily, probably once a month at least. To say, “this is what we’re doing, this is what, you know, this is what happened, we’ve managed to do this.” And just being, giving a few like thank-yous things like that. I think that’s, that’s a good thing. You know, I don’t believe anybody, any of our volunteers do this for recognition. You know it’s all because they want to do it, they want to help people. So, I don’t think it’s about being recognised, its about being recognised for what they’re doing. Urm, so I think the motivation, I personally think it comes from within. So, like we know that we’re doing good, we know that we’re putting a smile on a small child’s face because they’ve now got a box of chocolate, a box of chocolate bars for Christmas where they wouldn’t have it. Urm one of the, with the schools that is next to – literally I could throw a stone and hit the school next to me. But their, their, they’re children who would leave at the end of, urm to go to their, it’s a high school, you know, they would normal have had their school prom, you know, their school prom in July, but they couldn’t have any of that. But we manged, or I managed to get funding and we did them gifts, so at least they had something to remember them doing it. And I think thats the motivation it’s knowing that they’ve got, they’ve got something that even despite the situation we’re all in, they’ve got something that is, you know, memorable for the right reasons – not because of COVID.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and also the volunteer, are you saying?

**Participant:** Yeah, I think from the volunteer perspective, that they, I would suggest, I would say that they would be the same, that that they don’t do it for, because they don’t do it because they’re paid – they’re not paid. They do it because they want to, urm… you know, I don’t think anybody’s refused to do, to do anything, you know, As I say we play, we play to the skills of the individual and like I say, some people prefer to, they can’t talk face-to-face, obviously it’s a bit difficult, but they can do it over the phone quite easily. Urm, you know, so I think they’re doing it because they want to. As I say, I think early on, I think a lot of them were doing it because they weren’t in work. They were, they were able to do, spend that time doing something that was beneficial. Not just sitting going nothing and watching TV. So, I think for the, probably from a mental perspective, they’ve offered their services to keep themselves going, urm I know, as I say, for me, I work, because I can work from home, it didn’t, I’ve been in work since March, the same as I would have been anyway, I just haven’t had to travel anywhere. So, nothing changed from a work perspective for me, really. But for other people they haven’t been able to go to work and this is a – they’ve got an outlet to help other people but also maintain their own mental wellbeing.

**Interviewer:** And the group, maintain it, do you think that there were some factors that helped to sustain the group?

**Participant:** Urm… I think, I think it’s just a desire, I don’t think it’s anything in particular, I just think it’s that, it’s the fact that we’re all in this together. Everybody’s in the same situation really. Everybody knows somebody that has had, been affected directly with COVID, you know with having COVID. Urm everybody, you know, knows it could be, you know it could be them, urm I think that’s what keeps - it’s knowing that we’ve got that we’ve got people there looking out for each other, and it they’re in need, they’ve got people that will come to their need, their rescue and their need as well.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And in terms of the coordinators, did you have often regular meetings as well?

**Participant:** Urm, I’m in touch with, yeah, with [COORDINATOR NAME], with [COORDINATOR NAME], because its mainly the two of us that run, run this group, we just message each other, pretty much, if need be everyday or we speak to each other on the phone. But we have, we’ve got a good working relationship because we work together with other group before, before COVID. Urm the same for the other group, there’s more of us doing that, because like I say its an established group. So, we’ve got like a secretary, a chair, urm, you know, myself, myself as the treasurer, so its like a half a dozen. But again, we’ve done that through social media, so WhatsApp groups or, or messenger groups. So, everything is done so we’re all interacting on their on a daily basis if need be to coordinate things.

**Interviewer:** Okay, were any of the things that you did strategic?

**Participant:** Strategic? Ooh… I think, I think we, not so much for the, for the [VILLAGE NAME] one, the [VILLAGE NAME] group, the other group the [GROUP NAME 2] that I’m part of, that’s more strategic because we know the need is there for the people. We know that its more of a social deprived area. Urm so we know there’s a lot of people on their own that are having, having care, or they need additional support, or they don’t have the income, so we know there’s a need there. Urm so that was more targeted, so that’s why we knew we were doing specifically for, urr elderly people or specifically for children, young children, or not. Whereas the [VILLAGE NAME] one, we we’ve done similar things, but we, we’ve not, we haven’t really targeted it in… urm… with the need. So, as I say we’ve got about eighty people at the moment for Christmas things, about fifty people urm, forty/fifty children. But that’s through nominations. Whereas we, we kind of know people, because again it all comes from an existing, an established group that we know the people who came to bingo, so we know where to go, because we know where they live. We didn’t know, we don’t know that I [VILLAGE NAME], we have to rely on people telling us, or nominating people to do things. So, it’s a bit more, less strategic more, we’ll see, we, we can plan for it, but we don’t know what we’re going to get. I’m just conscious of time because I do have a phone call in a minute, so.

**Interviewer:** Okay, yeah, so just have two, two more questions, can I?

**Participant:** Yeah, no problem?

**Interviewer:** So, urr the, the first one is have you learnt anything from coordinating the group?

**Participant:** Urm, me, I I don’t know, \*laughs\*. I probably, I’ve probably learnt more how to fill in a grant application that anything. And trying to justify the reason for money, that’s probably my biggest one to be honest is that, and depending on the organisation, depends on the detail they want.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Yeah, some don’t require much detail, others want, urm, complete stories of everything-

\*Phone rings\*

**Interviewer:** Right, you have to go.

**Participant:** One second, can I just answer this call, I’ll tell them I’ll ring them back.

**Interviewer:** Sorry.

**Participant:** No, it’s okay.

**Interviewer:** So urm and how do you see the future of this group?

**Participant:** Urm I think this group is, the one group is sure, because it was set up purely for COVID, I think long term wise it is, urm, it will, I think it will merge into, or be absorbed into some of the other activities of the groups that are going on. So, we have, we have a Neighbourhood Watch in the, in this area, in the [VILLAGE NAME] area, so the Neighbourhood Watch also looks out of the community and you know, and safety and security and things like that. But I think a lot of the activity, you know, things that potentially will get absorbed into the existing Neighbourhood Watch. But the group itself will, I think will fizzle out in terms of, urm needing to be there in that, in that sense. I don’t think we’ll have a need, have a need to keep the Facebook group going, you know in maybe a year’s time when the vaccinations role out. You know, I think that will go. The other group, I think will continue as it is because it is an existing group and it is, you know, that group works in the community anyway. So, we will continue to do that anyway, that will be continuing regardless of COVID. I think it’s just different, a different group will pick it up. So, we, as I say, I think, there will still be a group and the group will still end up coordinating things, anything that happened, when we had the flooding, the Neighbourhood Watch, some Neighbourhood Watch members assisted people in, you know, which were affected. I mean it wasn’t that many people in this, in this particular area that were flooded, but we had about a dozen households. But we assisted that way anyway. So, you know the COVID group is an extension, is almost an extension, we’re using the bank account anyway. So, there’s a link, and both [COORDINATOR NAME] and I are involved in that group as well so I think it will become more of a, rather than a separate group it will go as one.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So, thank you.

**Participant:** That’s okay.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, I don’t think I have more questions, thank you. Urr is there anything that you want to add.

**Participant:** No, no, that’s fine, I think it will be good if [COORDINATOR NAME], if you could have that interview with [COORDINATOR NAME], because [COORDINATOR NAME] will make, will give you a different perspective on it, you know.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, so just a final question, do you want to, because we would like to share the results with you, and we might organise some public events –

**Participant:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Yeah? So, you want to keep informed about the project?

**Participant:** Yeah, definitely, that will be great.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Yeah, these things are interesting in terms of, urr the community, as I say being a [ELECTED POSITION 1] as well, one of the things were doing from a council perspective is becoming more, urr focused on community engagement. Rather than, you now, rather than… urm so more, more doing things in the community rather than doing things that have always been done in the past. You know so we, we’re trying to change that, the organisation - as [ELECTED POSITION 1], we’re trying to change the direction of the organisation to look at the things in the community more for sustainability. And to help groups from, if you haven’t got a group. You know if there is no community group or, things, there are areas of this town that do not have any groups. You know, I’m, we’re, people who live in this area do not realise how fortunate they are. I’ll be honest, you know, because there are these groups there, I other parts of the town, there are no groups, there is no Neighbourhood Watch, there are no community groups, they don’t have, urm people who do things, you know, in the community for them or anything like that. They are very, you know, they’re, they’re not isolated, there’s lots of things going on, but urm, there’s isn’t a group that just does things for the community. So, that’s where we’re looking from a council perspective.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Okay so I will keep, I will keep you in touch, any more about the project, thank you.

**[Debriefing]**

**[End of Interview]**