**Date: 19/12/2020**

**Duration:** 43:53

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

And my first question is if you can tell me the name of your group and when did the group start?

**Participant:** Okay so it’s [GROUP NAME].

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** When did it start? Kind of around the time we were in lockdown so around the eighteenth of March I think.

**Interviewer:** Okay and how was, how did it start, who was involved this kind of thing

**Participant:** So, there was a couple of people that had set it up, urm and were kind of, it was quite new and were talking about, I I saw them talking about using, what was it, a google sheets I think. Urm… with a google forms to gather information for people. And I said to them, “looks there’s a much better ways of doing it,” urm, and and then I ended up doing it, because that’s what happens, you know. So that’s kind of how I got involved because I’m a bit of a nerd and I always like to see a more efficient methods and more secure as well.

**Interviewer:** So, what kind of methods did you propose?

**Participant:** Urm, so Airtable, so I set up an Airtable with two forms. One for people who were in need, one for volunteers. Urr that was in the same Airtable so they could be cross referenced so the person who was you know maybe doing the volunteering you could see the people they were maybe doing it for, or multiple people. Urm, so it’s a really good way of keeping records of things as well as – because people fill in the form for themselves so it’s not like you have to do much. They just, they do all the work really. That’s why I like Airtable. And we set up another one for traders, businesses so at the beginning everyday I was taking *that* particular Airtable outputting it to pdf I think and then uploading it to the group. Because it was all influx and everybody know what was open, where to get things, who did deliveries. So that’s the info that it was providing.

So, we kind of had that, and then we urm… I set up some QR codes and Bitly links to put on a poster so we could put it up around town. Because we knew the Facebook group was growing and people, you know, that’s, it’s, it’s an, it’s a just… what’s the word it a closed set of people really, isn’t it? Those who use Facebook. Some people might be the most in need are the people who don’t have no Facebook, no smartphone, none of that. And they might be still struggling around town trying to do things for themselves when they could have help. Urm, so I got those posters put up in places like bus stops and outside the, kind of urm convenience stores and things like that. But at the same time, it was kind if not the easiest thing because urm not everyone knows how to sue QR codes, not everyone, you know, can use the Bitlys and also, we had to keep kind of using, because it’s bilingual as well – I forgot to say that bit. We work in both languages urm, so it got a bit cumbersome after a while. So, we had, you know, three different databases in two languages, of different things. And people were saying, “oh can we just have one link, one thing,” so that was the point at which I set up a WordPress site and it it all that does it provide an interface where the Airtable forms are imbedded so people just go to the website and click on volunteering or support or urr business and then urm… other people can also look at the business information, obviously not the personal information, but the business information is kind of played back. And so that was bulk of the website really, other than putting a front page on. Took some pictures like all the little kids Rainbows that were up at the time, took pictures of those put those on the front page. Tried to do a bit of a blog, but that didn’t really take off, but it, you know, it just holds together all the forms really. So that’s the kind of technical part of it.

**Interviewer:** So, what was the goal of the group when it started?

**Participant:** Urm, just to urm, put people in need in touch with people who would help. And information about what what’s open and what’s not open and all that?

**Interviewer:** Has anything changed since it started?

**Participant:** Urm, yeah so at the beginning it was big deal and everyone was kind of running around a bit frenzied and a bit worried and nobody knew whether they had to like wipe down their shopping with bleach, you know people were getting really… scared and didn’t know what to do. So, there was a lot of traffic in the group. People were asking for help; a lot of people were volunteering as well because people wanted to help when there is a crisis it – for some people it brings out the best in them and for some people it brings out the worst in them.

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

**Participant:** Currently, of urm okay so… urm… at one point the group fractured. [GROUP MEMBER NAME], I guess told you about this.

**Interviewer:** Yes, she mentioned.

**Participant:** Yeah, so we ended up with kind of two groups, one being the people who stayed on admin on Facebook, urm, and also were doing the matching volunteers to people in need. And then the other group was doing the urm design website, tech stuff. So that, that’s what I was doing, urm and then [GROUP MEMBER NAME] was floating between the two because she’s the group, kind of, peacemaker. All groups need one of those. Urm so, I’ve slightly forgotten the question now.

**Interviewer:** The situation with the group.

**Participant:** Ah yes. Urm… yeah so quite a few weeks ago I noticed that urm there was loads of post waiting to be approved on the Facebook page, I thought this is a bit odd, no one seems to be doing this. Urm and it wasn’t my job, but I still had admin status, so I went ahead, did it, and then got in touch with [GROUP MEMBER NAME] and said, “do you know what’s happening here? Nobody seems to be doing anything?” Urm and we were starting to build up into a you know a period of more concern again and lockdown. And urr… in the end the people that were doing that at that point just suddenly decided that they’d had enough and wanted to resign. Urm, so the other three of us that were left had to move in and take on the Facebook group again urm and yeah there’s kind of where we’re at now.

**Interviewer:** And have you had any previous experience of coordinating groups like this?

**Participant:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** You did?

**Participant:** Yeah, plenty.

**Interviewer:** Okay so you have been involved, if you can tell me a little bit more about your experiences?

**Participant:** Urm… well in quite a few of my jobs I’ve had to like coordinate like groups of volunteers. Urm… you know whether that’s [OCCUPATION 1], or [OCCUPATION 2] or [CHARITY NAME 1], lots of different things.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And why did you get involved?

**Participant:** Because I could see that they, that they needed help to deal with the situation. I also know that this Google forms and sheets that a lot of the groups were using, I wasn’t sure about the security on that, didn’t feel… didn’t feel right. And I yeah, I wanted to give them, give them the gift of Airtable, you know, because its marvellous. You know if you’re a right nerd you understand how good Airtable is.

**Interviewer:** And when did you get involved? It was in March?

**Participant:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay, just a about-

**Participant:** Yeah, I created first Airtable, when I was in the bath.

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

**Participant:** A bit of everything now, yeah.

**Interviewer:** So, you mentioned that it has changed a little bit, so how how did it change?

**Participant:** Urm… group dynamics, group politics. One person - see the thing is I didn’t know about mutual aid before this thing came about. And… I can’t remember but… you know as soon as I heard the term ‘Mutual Aid’ I thought, what’s that, looked it up, and thought, “oh this is great! Mutual aid: people helping people in a non-hierarchal way.” I thought that was fantastic and a really good way to get stuff done and let people work to their strengths and all that stuff. So, I thought that’s fantastic. But then one member of the group decided that because she was on the town council, she would have to have her words, “the final say on some issues.” And that didn’t sit right with me. In that, you know in terms of a mutual aid group, there’s one person who was then saying, “I’m more important than everyone else!” It may not come down to a group vote that’s a majority decision, it might come down to me saying things I want. At the same time as that was going on, I was defiantly trying to churn out just a business card and a poster to put up around town and I’d… you know I’d done it, she was arguing about this, that at and the other, trying to tell me that she knew more about it, things than me, and she didn’t. And… it just got really ridiculous, it was just pathetic. So that aspect of it I just took it into my own hands, sent the files to the printer, said, well, you know if town council won’t agree to pay for this, I’ll pay for it, it’s only ten, twenty quid or something. So at least then we had the cards, we had decent posters we could put up around town.

Urm… we also \*laughs\* you know the g-mail account you used, you know I set that up as a group e-mail that anyone could use because, I think it’s better to have a group e-mail, than for everyone to be using their private e-mails. I think that’s wrong. In terms of data security, I think it’s wrong. So, I set that up, and that caused loads of arguments as well. Because I think I responded in a thread that this other person had started, and she was really annoyed about that. And I had to explain to her that, you know… at work we have this situation, you know, we have our own e-mail accounts, but we also have a general one, like an info e-mail and any of us might answer those e-mails, as long as they get answered it’s fine and that’s how I’m used to working. And her argument was, “but it was *my* e-mail! I did the e-mail.” And I said, “no, it’s not, ‘my’ anything, it’s meant to be ‘our.’ So, there was this kind of notion, still that the group was not non-hierarchal. That’s a double negative, I know. But it was hierarchal in that single person veto. Urm… so it, you know I just, I’d had enough by then and urm, yeah that was when the group split.

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

**Participant:** How does it relate to other parts of your life? I’m not sure I understand.

**Interviewer:** How does it fit, how do you fit the activity in the group n your life?

**Participant:** How do I fit it in, okay. Urm… it, well because it… activity has fluctuated so, early on when it was, when there was a lot to do, you know it was hard work, I do have a job as well, seventeen and half hours a week, sometimes a lot more than that. And I’m a voluntary [VOLUNTEER ROLE]. So, there were times when the workloads was pretty big. Urm and once, once everything had kind of been done, they systems had been set up, you know the tables the website, printing the materials had been done and then somebody else was handling the Facebook side of it so that was less work for me really. Urm so it’s only now that we’ve come back in to being the Facebook admins essentially when… when the numbers are coming up quite significantly in [COUNTY NAME] and we’ve largely escaped urm, really serious infection rates here until now. So, I think we were starting to go into worry mode again and will… urm… yeah.

But three of us have just kind of taking it on without yet kind of having the time to… sit down and sat who’s, who’s going to do what. So, we will do that, but I’ve only finished work yesterday so, is it Saturday today, yeah, so we haven’t had time to do that yet, but we will do that.

**Interviewer:** Okay. What geographical area has the group covered?

**Participant:** [COUNTY NAME], well no, [TOWN NAME] really which is a town in [COUNTY NAME] urm, but there’s a lot of little outlaying villages as well, so it kind of covered about a ten mile radius I suppose of [TOWN NAME].

**Interviewer:** Okay and what kind of things does the group do?

**Participant:** Urm in terms of volunteering?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Participant:** Its, its largely… shopping, food shopping. There was, somebody, somebody was in hospital for a long time with an injury and his wife would make him up a bag with clean clothes and… food and then a volunteer would take that down to the hospital. Which is an hours drive away, so not insignificant volunteering. And bring his old clothes back and that would happen every week. But there was some kind of things that went on and some things that were just kind of one-off.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And how-

**Participant:** [audio interference 18:16].

**Interviewer:** Sorry.

**Participant:** I’m sorry my dog is shouting like crazy at the door, I just need to let her out, I’ll be back, I’ll be right back.

**Interviewer:** Okay. He’s asking for attention.

**Participant:** Sorry, about that.

**Interviewer:** That’s okay, no problem. So, you were saying the kind of things that the group do. So shopping, giving support to the community, so emotional support giving information, this kind of thing, yeah?

**Participant:** Yeah, there was some kind of urr, you know just people to talk to you on the phone and those kinds of things.

**Interviewer:** And how, how often urm, it was? It was every day, every week? Urm

**Participant:** What that I was doing things?

**Interviewer:** No, the activities, the shopping and-

**Participant:** Oh okay. Urm… I don’t know off the top of my head, urr I you know, I think there was quite a lot of activity in the early phases and then after June people probably went back to doing what they were normally doing and now they were starting to come back, possibly come back in again. Especially if we go into another shut down, or lockdown or firebreak or whatever you call it.

**Interviewer:** Did you notice already an increase?

**Participant:** There’s a lot, there’s definitely an increase in the Facebook group, lots of people are joining urr new members and urm people who are coming in to see the statistics of the day and things like that.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And what resources do you have? Resources.

**Participant:** Like?

**Interviewer:** Like funds, donations, it can be any kind of resource? Do you have any?

**Participant:** Urm… no I don’t think so. I think… early on we did get somebody donate a large urr… bit gallon thing of… anti urr what do you call it, anti-septic hand wash, urm and gloves so we gave some stuff out to the volunteers who were doing deliveries early on, back at the start. But yeah, that’s about it really. The town council did pay for the printing, not that it was much, but yeah, they did pay for that.

**Interviewer:** And are there any particular skills that people in the group have?

**Participant:** Urm… we’ll I’ve got my skills in nerdy stuff, you know digital, kind of stuff. [GROUP MEMBER NAME], who you spoke to, has her she has good people skills, \*laughs\*. She’s the one who’s kind of gathering the data and doing graphs and stuff at the moment and then the other person that’s still in the group is very good at proof reading and copywriting and that kind of area and singing.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And how did you get people involved, the volunteers, involved?

**Participant:** Urm… they would be referred either through the Facebook group, or through seeing a poster or a card or knowing somebody else who was, word of mouth, the usual things.

**Interviewer:** Okay, is there, sorry you have a Facebook, do you have other social media?

**Participant:** No, we don’t, no.

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

**Participant:** Urm… don’t know. We’re registered as a mutual aid group as far as I know. Urr yeah, which was, you know, when I read it and realised that were actually not a mutual aid group if we’ve got one person insisting that they’re urr, that they have more, you know, [portions? 22:43] than others, but she’s, she’s stopped now, she’s gone away so we are a mutual aid group now.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And is the, how is the, if the group is in contact with other groups locally? It is?

**Participant:** Mmm, not massively. Urr early on we were, we kind of were in touch with things like [ORGANISATION NAME 1] and other groups that would be be putting volunteers into the system. There is a a [COUNTY NAME] urm group which is the whole county, on Facebook. Urm I don’t know that they’re doing volunteering in the way that we’ve been doing it. I think it’s probably; I think it’s a bit more informal, people ask on the page, “can anyone help with something,” and they might, you know, somebody might help them.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and any other organisations, could be political, community organisations?

**Participant:** Urm, oh the local urm… urr, what are they called? [ORGANISATION NAME 2 ABBREVIATION] is [ORGANISATION NAME 2], so it’s the umbrella organisation of voluntary groups in the county. So… urr sometimes after we had our website up and running, they said, “oh, we’re making a website urm for volunteering,” urm so… we may at some point try and merger the two. Yeah, but they obviously are covering a wider area and different types of volunteering. But they did, they did use a lot of the photos I took, so that was good.

**Interviewer:** And how is the relationship with the local council? The local authority?

**Participant:** Town council?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Participant:** Urr its fine, as far as I know, all good. The person that I keep referring to who said they were more important quit the town council in a hissy fit about something completely different, so she’s not on the town council anymore. Urm one of the people that has helped us keep up with the translation is… is on the town council and… urm… we know if you want the town councillors that’s that’s all fine, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay and has your group tried to get official recognition, for example becoming a charity or a company?

**Participant:** No, I think, I think being a mutual aid, organisation really is is the best set up. You know either… either that or we kind of let go of it when it’s all over. Or we’ll find that we do have a community resource that could be you know kind of moved over to doing different things. When we were setting up the website, you know, there’s always a big deal to choose the name, isn’t there, and are we going to call it, [TOWN NAME] Coronavirus Support Group dot whatever? It’s too much so we ended up calling it [TOWN NAME] support because then… it could just be about supporting [TOWN NAME] it doesn’t always have to be about the virus.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Urm… you talk a bit about your own motivations to get involve, and how about the motivations of other active participants? Why do you think they get involved?

**Participant:** Urm, well there’s only three of us, so you’ve spoke to [GROUP MEMBER NAME] yeah, and you’ve spoke to me yeah, and one other person. Urm, I think just probably got dragged in for one of their skills, copywriting, proofreading skills and she’s also been very much the liaising with the [LANGUAGE] translation because she knows the counsellor who’s, who’s been doing that for us. Urr so yeah. I guess that’s kind of –

**Interviewer:** And the volunteers? The motivations of the volunteers?

**Participant:** Oh, the volunteers in general?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Participant:** Oh, okay. Urm… do you know people just, some people are just really nice and they can see that there’s going to be people in need and they have a… they want to know how to help somebody. You know the point of seeing up the urm the Airtable to cross reference was so that we could find people who are close geographically, so they weren’t kind of you know, having to drive to the other side of the county and back again to get their shopping, they can just you know do the shopping for that person at the same time as they were doing there’s kind of thing. Urm… yeah people are almost desperate to be able to volunteer to do something. I had - somebody knocked on my door and said, “hey are you alright, do you need, you know do you need any help, I’ve signed up to be a volunteer on this site and I haven’t had a chance yet and you know, I know you’re disabled, I just wondered if you needed any help?” I said, “oh, I’m fine, thank you offering.” But yeah, that’s my database he just filled in. So, so that’s what I mean people really want to help.

**Interviewer:** Urm and how about any problems that you and the group have encountered during this process? Urm for example has involvement in the group meant a lot of time and effort for you? and for the others?

**Participant:** Yeah, early on, for me was the time it took up, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Emotional effort as well?

**Participant:** Oh god, it just, just, when it got all got silly and argumentative and “I’m more important, I’m on the council,” and all of that stuff, yeah, I just, you know, I can’t bare people when they’re acting like that, it’s too much.

**Interviewer:** Okay so you have some problems in terms of coordinating issues in the beginning?

**Participant:** Urm not quite in the beginning it was a bit you know, kind of a couple, was it a month in or something, I don’t know. Something like that.

**Interviewer:** What, in your opinion what was the reason for those problems? Just try to understand urm what kind of problems that have affected the group, how do you see it?

**Participant:** There’s, there’s a particular kind of a person that cannot help but need to be in charge. Urm and you can see this reflected in different parts of their life. Urm and that’s fine, over there, but when you come and say that “this is a mutual aid group, but I’m more important,” to me that’s a massive contradiction in terms. I’m autistic and I like things straight forward, say what you mean, don’t don’t have subtext, don’t read subtext into what I’m saying either. Urm, but you know that that was all just didn’t make sense to me. And that’s when I struggle with things when they are contradictory and urr hypocritical.

**Interviewer:** Okay, did you feel that you had enough people in the group? The volunteers, enough volunteers for the people

**Participant:** Yes, yes.

**Interviewer:** Enough resources?

**Participant:** Urr, well like I said, there wasn’t a lot in terms of resources, urm there wasn’t money. All we got – oh I know what we got, we got car stickers and badges, “COVID 19 Volunteer,” it says. We got those, didn’t help anything particularly but we got them.

**Interviewer:** How did you get that? From the council?

**Participant:** Urm… from the urm county volunteering organisation. I think they did it, yeah. Urm… and yeah resources so people, that’s why we were trying to get volunteer to help people that were close to them so they didn’t end up spending money on petrol having to go further than they would do otherwise.

**Interviewer:** Okay and have people drop out of the group? Apart from the ones that you mentioned, the coordination.

**Participant:** The four of them, out of seven, yeah, they’ve gone. I don’t know if they’ll come back or what, but yeah, for the moment they’ve gone.

**Interviewer:** So, urm why, what was the reasons?

**Participant:** I don’t know, they got board of it? Can’t be bothered anymore? I don’t know, I mean I wouldn’t… unless I just happened to spot the fact that there was all these posts stacking up, urm I’m not sure what would have happened because they just sort of got board of it.

**Interviewer:** Okay and volunteers do you have volunteers dropping out as well?

**Participant:** Urm, I’m, not that I’m aware of but then because I think they’ve been using their own email addresses rather than using the group e-mail, so things like that are not apparent. At the moment I’m trying to organise, because as well as using their own e-mail accounts I… believe that at some point they also exported the data out of Airtable into Excel, which is not a database, but apparently it was the only, one person could only use Excel, couldn’t use Airtable, couldn’t learn anything new. So, I’m very importantly, urgently need to know if they continued to input data into Excel that has not been put back into Airtable. And the same with the e-mails, if there are e-mails that are relevant to the ongoing urm… activity of the group, we need those e-mails and we need their data, and they need to get it off their personal computers because it’s not legal to help other people’s data on your computer without a good reason. So, I’m kind of worried about that at the moment and I’m given the task of that to [GROUP MEMBER NAME], because she’s the mediator, unfortunately for her. But if I ask they just, you know, will tell me to fuck off, you know. So, she’s going to have to do it.

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

**Participant:** Not give up. I guess, you know.

**Interviewer:** For example, right okay yes. So.

**Participant:** You know it was a group that had already fractured into two groups, so in a way it’s kind of amazing that it has kept going at all. Urm and whether we can keep going with just three of us if things get bad, I don’t, I don’t know, we might have to call some more people in, we’ll see. But at least I’m off work for a couple of weeks so I can, you know try and put back together any data that’s been lost of you know, not in Airtable.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and the volunteers, did you do, the group do anything to keep the volunteers motivated?

**Participant:** Mmm, other than I guess posting stuff in Facebook I’m not aware that any other activity went on.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** But then I wouldn’t necessarily be aware, but I don’t think so.

**Interviewer:** Okay, urm, finally I want to ask whether you have learned anything from coordinating the group?

**Participant:** Urm… I wouldn’t say I coordinated the group; I’d like to say I was part of coordinating the group. What have I learned? That some people cannot help but have to be in charge. Urm and there are situations where that’s acceptable and appropriate, and there are situations where it’s not.

**Interviewer:** Okay, urm anything else, for example about organisation? About how local governments works? Was anything new for you?

**Participant:** Not really no. Because I worked in the voluntary sector for… a long time, twenty something years so.

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

**Participant:**  Urm, I’m not sure, I’m not sure. Like I said it may or may not keep going urm… as a [TOWN NAME] Support group, of some sort. I think it would be, I think it would be good if it could because volunteering is really important urm… for not just the people that are the direct beneficiaries, but the volunteers themselves. It’s you know one of the central kind of you know, mental health, DIY, useful things to do for your mental health. Its good for people to volunteer. Especially in a situation where you know, everyone’s at home, maybe they’re a bit bored, maybe they’re furloughed from work, so early on people were you know, almost begging to have some volunteering to do.

**Interviewer:** And how do you see your role in the group?

**Participant:** Urm-

**Interviewer:** In the future.

**Participant:** Chief nerd.

**Interviewer:** So, you want to keep going?

**Participant:** Urm I’ll keep going, you know, if there’s a need and something useful I can do, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay thank you I don’t think I have any more urm, so just to clarify in terms of urm… needs at the moment, have you been receiving requests for help?

**Participant:** Urm there’s been a few that have kind of come through the Facebook group. So, somebody said, “oh, wouldn’t it be lovely if someone would deliver me a Christmas dinner ready to eat?” I think she was just fantasising, but someone offered to do that.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** So sometimes it’s that easy it’s just, “I wish this could happen,” and someone said, “it can happen.” So that kind of kicked of a discussion about you know, food, food in general because we have a food bank in [TOWN NAME] and what’s called a food project. They’re different things, you know, but they’re both about supplying food to people who are in need a little bit.

**Interviewer:** And are you in contact with them?

**Participant:** That, yeah, we’re trying to coordinate around urm… they’ve, the food project has set up what they’re calling a Click and Collect services, so if you want a Christmas dinner, we’ll do you one but you have to come and get it. So, urr not everyone can do it. So, we need to coordinate people who can do some deliveries as well. Or in some cases it might just be – one of the things I’ve been saying a lot is: be aware of your neighbours. If everyone could just be aware, that neighbour there, and that neighbour there, are they okay? Urm, because then everyone becomes more connected, don’t they? Urm, so if you know that your neighbour is alone, they maybe elderly or disabled or they they don’t have a lot of resources, maybe you will bring them around a Christmas dinner, maybe you know you’ll do something else for them. But just be aware of those two immediate households as well as your own, and that would help a lot, I think.

**Interviewer:** Did it change anything in the community with this?

**Participant:** Urm I don’t know, I think… I think that’s a long-term question. Because of course everything has changed in the community, for the moment. Urm and we’ll see how, what it goes back to afterwards. But yeah, I’d love for the volunteers to stay being volunteers, whether it’s with us or whether they go back to the county organisation or what. But yeah, to capture that spirit of volunteering before it, you know, before people get bored. Especially if they’ve urm… if they’ve set up to volunteer and not been given anything to do. Then, you know, you can lose them very easily.

**Interviewer:** Okay, well thank you, I don’t think I have any more questions, is there anything you wanted to add?

**[Debriefing]**

**[End of Interview]**