**Date: 20/11/2020**

**Duration:** 54:27

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

Urm, so I contacted your group by e-mail but if you can tell me the name of your group and how and when did the groups start.

**Participant:** Urm, it’s called [GROUP NAME]. Urm, let me just check… urm, it was in March, we set it up in March, urm, I think it was the twelfth but let me just check. Urm…

**Interviewer:** After, just after or before the lockdown? How was the process?

**Participant:** Urm, right at the beginning.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** It was right at the beginning. So basically, urm I think I was on Twitter, no I was on Facebook and the lockdown was announced and I noticed a couple of friends of mine in [BOROUGH NAME 1] had set up urm a mutual aid group there. So basically, I just spoke to my flat mate… urr about setting one up in [CONSTITUENCY NAME] and that’s basically how, how it started. Do you want me to tell you how… how we set it up because that was a very long process?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Participant:** So, basically urm, we noticed that… with the other mutual aid groups urm that they just set up the Facebook group as the platform. So, if anyone wanted to volunteer, they’d join the Facebook group, if anyone needed any help, they’d post on the Facebook group. But we wanted something that was much more sustainable and a bit more long term. So the the first thing – we set up the Facebook group immediately just to make sure that it was there and – and then we had I think it was two weeks of a lot of background work. So we were basically organising the neighbourhoods, so we divided – so so basically [GROUP NAME] just covers the constituency of [CONSTITUENCY NAME] it’s not – we’re in [BOROUGH NAME 2], but there was a couple of other [BOROUGH NAME 2] groups, and we don’t cover [BOROUGH NAME 3] either. So, it’s just the constituency of [CONSTITUENCY NAME]. So, we divided the – basically used Google Maps and we divided the constituency into, I think it was just over eighty neighbourhoods. So – and then we set up the e-mail and everything so, through Facebook, if people wanted to volunteers we’d direct them to… urr to e-mail, they would e-mail with their postcode and then according to their post-code we we’d allocate them to to different to different neighbourhoods as volunteers. That was a very long process, it took – because we were inundated, we had like thousands of e-mails and it too us like three weeks I think it was just to get through them.

Urm, and then… urm, so after we, after we did that, we had a group of volunteers, I think we had over a thousand but they need to be managed somehow, so each neighbourhood has a coordinator and someone helping then. Urm, and we gave urm the coordinators training in things like GDPR, financial management, urr doorstep etiquette, consent, kind of stuff like that, so they know. Because a lot of these people they’d never done anything like this before, they’re not experienced in community organising, they’re not experienced in volunteering. And also, we had a feeling, the the, the difference between BMA and the other groups was we wanted to think about … what kind of urm… structure support could be available for vulnerable residence. Urm, so… urm, say in [BOROUGH NAME 1] for example, urm, a volunteer urr, someone volunteers on the Facebook group, they go to urm, the residents house and they notice that the resident needs structural support, some kind of social working – social care intervention or health intervention. That person might not be equipped to know what resources are available. Urm, so we, so we tried to do it in that, in that kind of way.

Urm, the other thing was that urm, they were three founders, myself, my flatmate, and another friend of ours who has a background working with urm, [HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION] as a community health expert. So, she she came with a wealth of experience on how to deal with these, kind of situations. So, we were very lucky in that, in that regard. So, urm, so between the three of us we kind of pooled our contacts and who do we know, and we’re all basically [POLITICAL PARTY 1] members so we immediately had access to hundreds of community activists so what we we did was – and we had access to local councillors, council members and through them loads of other contacts as well. So, from the beginning we had that kind of, long term sort of, sort of vision, what are we going to do in six months a years’ time, yeah.

**Interviewer:** And why did you thought about the long term vision?

**Participant:** Urm, we made lots of mistakes because we’d never done anything like this before. Urm, and in fact, urm, as I, as I got more and more confident doing this, urm, I had people from other mutual aid groups asking for advice, like, “how can we do this, how can we do that?” So, I was basically telling them well these, these were our mistakes, don’t, don’t copy them, do it like this instead. Yeah, so we learnt a lot, a lot of it was urm, stumbling, I think if we had to do it again there is a completely different was of going about it. I think we would have set up the neighbourhoods first and then recruited the volunteers and had that sort of infrastructural kind of urm… the infrastructure in place before we did, before we took on volunteers.

**Interviewer:** Mmm, and has anything changed since the group start then?

**Participant:** Urm, yeah… urm in the beginning because people, people generally were urm… had no experience of going into this so I think there was a lot of fear and a lot of apprehension from ordinary people. Urr at the same time there was a huge so, urm, galvanisation of peoples urr empathy, if…. For want of a better way of saying it. People were a lot more empathetic. Urm… at the beginning. Urr… what we’ve had like ups and downs in terms of urr, requests for help. Sometimes it’s very very high – in the beginning it was very very high. It was, I mean it became a full-term job basically, from from March, April, May it was urr a full time job with lots of overtime. \*Laughs\*

Urm, and then June, July it sort of calmed down, the volunteers and the coordinators had started to find their feet. Now we’re going into a second lockdown I think – well what we wanted to do was urm, the central organising committee would stake a step back. We’re not like urm… you know… we’re not the managers, it’s a very horizontal kind of… kind of organisation. Because I mean mutual aid started its – it’s an anarchist idea, it goes back to Kropotkin. So, but… the thing is, to have something, but but a lot of the organisers in other areas are actually, you know, they adopted the Kropotkin urm… method but I mean, there’s been a lot of change in how local urm resources are organised since those days. So, you do, and and the way people live atomised lives there not, there’s not that – in order to have a mutual aid group that’s completely anarchist you need to have people, you need to have residents that have a sense of community. You have that that that sense of belonging somewhere and knowing people has to exist. However, urm… we live in a very atomised society, and that’s another thing that we discovered. That, you know, people don’t actually know each other. But if they were approached by someone who lived on their street, they might be… you know, it might be easier for them to build trust and so on. Urm, so… so even though there are elements of that horizontal organising, there’s still a kind of guiding hand if you like from from the central committee. We were actually called Trotsky-ites by some of the, some of the other [GROUP NAME] groups because there was a central committee and there’s not supposed to be a central committee. I know in [BOROUGH NAME 4] the… the mutual aid groups is basically run by local councillors and it’s it’s publicity for them. Urr, that’s not what what we wanted. So, there is a guiding hand, but it’s not hands on.

**Interviewer:** Um-hmm, okay. Urm, have you had any previous experience of organising groups?

**Participant:** No, no, not on this scale.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Not on this scale. Urr… not even community organising, actually. I’ve done some urm… the the only, the only kind of political activism I’ve done is… urm… canvassing for the [POLITICAL PARTY 1] and, you know, that sort of thing.

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

**Participant:** Urm… I, I, it’s difficult, I mean in [BOROUGH NAME 1], urm… when I saw the other groups on Facebook it was just a spur of the moment thing. Urm… but given the kind of contacts that we were able to establish, the the urm and how active the [POLITICAL PARTY 1] is in [CONSTITUENCY NAME], and our proximity to urr working class communities, to the local communities. Urm… I I’m not sure that anyone else could. I’m not sure the [POLITICAL PARTY 2] activists could have organised on this scale. And in fact, we’ve not had anyone. Anybody from the [POLITICAL PARTY 2] urr… like [POLITICAL PARTY 2] activists, [POLITICAL PARTY 2] councillors approach us.

**Interviewer:** Hmm.

**Participant:** to urm, to help. Why? I suppose empathy. Urm… urm… I, I, I, I mean I was in isolation because I am one of the immune-compromised people. So… urm, so there was a sense of that as well. Yeah.

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

**Participant:** Urm, so my side of it is more volunteer recruitment and training. So, kind of onboarding volunteers, organising them into urm, into which neighbourhood group they go, connecting them to WhatsApp groups and so on, yeah.

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

**Participant:** Urm… well, in in the beginning of the lockdown this is all that we were doing. So, urm… the the last job that I was, the last full-time job that ai was doing urm, ended in urm… at the end of December last year. So, I was literally not doing anything else.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** So urm… it does connect in terms of my political outlook. Urm… being urr part of the [POLITICAL PARTY 1], urm… being working class, being a member of a vulnerable group as well. Yeah.

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

**Participant:** So, urm, so the the the main thing is running errands, so shopping. Urm, there there wasn’t so much need for collecting prescriptions because a couple of the pharmacies in the urm, in the area urr approached us urm, as a delivery service, so there wasn’t a need for that. There was some people who need company. So, volunteers just called them up and keep them company on the phone. We had some urm… some people with experience urm, volunteering for Samaritans. There was, there was one guy who was trained in suicide intervention. So, there was one resident whose friend contacted us urm, saying that she was having suicidal ideational episode. So, urm…, the urm, one of the volunteers was able to speak to them on the phone. It’s a broad range, it’s a broad range urr of, of things but those are the things that they come down to. Sometimes you get urm… unexpected requests like walking the dog for example – stuff like that. Urm… but it’s not, I mean there’s not. The the main thing is running errands really. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** And how often do people in the group do these things?

**Participant:** I, I wouldn’t know because it goes through urm the neighbourhood coordinators. So, each neighbourhood has a contact e-mail and a number. Urr so in the beginning we sent out flyers per neighbourhood, so they would call them. Urm… urr there were, I mean at the beginning of lockdown we were getting lots of requests on the Facebook group and e-mail, asking for help. So, I I I mean, urr… now I couldn’t tell because the neighbourhoods are much more – basically organising themselves. But there was a huge urm… urr requests for help at the beginning of lockdown-

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant: -**coming through to the actual, the actual [GROUP NAME] e-mail.

**Interviewer:** And in this first – in this second lockdown?

**Participant:** Not so much coming through to us. Urm, we’ve had a couple of requests but now – people know now to urm, send in what their specific request is, and there urm… their postcodes. So, we used that to allocate them to their neighbourhood – to send on their details to their neighbourhood coordinator. I mean I could speak to them and… speak to kind of like a rough number of them and see what they’re saying and get back to you. Urm, but I… I I I think it’s a lot calmer now than it is, than it was at the beginning.

**Interviewer:** Mm-hmm, but just to understand a little bit more, so you have urm... urm, can you explain a little bit more how you organising and co-ordinate the groups? How…

**Participant:** Okay, I can actually send you something-

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Urm…just give me, give me a second, I just have to go into the drive. …Urm…so, urm… what – I’ll show you what the map looks like, if I can find it, urm…

**Interviewer:** That’s okay.

**Participant:** So, if I, if I share the screen with you,

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** I can show you, urm…. So, can you see this?

**Interviewer:** Um-hmm.

**Participant:** Okay, so this is basically how the neighbourhood was organised, we have – so, all of these are the neighbourhood groups. Urm, if I go into one of them. Okay, so this is one of the neighbourhoods, so each neighbourhood has a WhatsApp group, this is just for the volunteers and this is the name of the coordinators. So, each these neighbourhoods has a coordinator and a WhatsApp group for volunteers. The WhatsApp group is managed by the coordinator. So, at the local level, urm, if a local resident in any of these neighbourhoods requires help, they’ll ring the urm, the number, the local number that they got. That number will go to the coordinator, the coordinator will put the request in the WhatsApp group. So, urm, with the postcode so whoever is living nearest to that particular resident would be the one to go to them. Some of the urm, neighbourhood groups have urm… you know over a hundred volunteers some of them have twenty it depends on… you know the distribution of volunteers. In terms of urm… how the… so, this is one of the flyers that we used. Sorry, if I zoom in… urm… here you can see so, urm… so, so this is this is a flyer for one of the neighbourhoods. All of the flyers look like this it’s just the only two – the only things that differ are the contact details, so there’s a free-phone number and a mobile number, they they can call.

Alternatively – and each neighbourhood has urm, as you see here, an e-mail. So this is [NEIGHBOURHOOD NAME] – [EMAIL ADDRESS] and then at the bottom if anyone wants to volunteer they can contact us on the central, central e-mail.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** There was something else for structure, I’ll just find \*muttering\*… so this was urm information we gave to each group coordinator and then we had urm – sorry \*muttering\* - then we had urm an process for assigning volunteer jobs, so all our volunteers knew how to, how to do it – sorry the coordinators knew how to, how to do it. And then I think somewhere there is, sorry this stuff we created months ago, and this is actually the first time I’m looking through it. So, then we had a safeguarding as well, information, hand out for them.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so you were a part of the central group?

**Participant:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** So here – so this is basically how it was organised. So, each of this, so each ward - so we had coordinators at a ward level, so we divided [CONSTITUENCY NAME] into wards. Urm, North – these are the wards here. Each ward had an overall coordinator, and these people were there point of contact for any kind of local services. Urm, referrals etc, etc, most of these are local councillors or people with experience urm… working in urm, public services. And then these are the local neighbourhood groups here, urm and then these are the coordinators and then their volunteer WhatsApp groups.

**Interviewer:** So, you have twelve neighbourhood groups?

**Participant:** Yeah so, we have, I think we have over eighty neighbourhood groups

**Interviewer:** Eighty, okay.

**Participant:** I think it’s eighty, urm, and then those neighbourhoods were organised according to ward. So, all of these people have no experience in community organising or volunteer management, so on, they have someone here who does. So, if they have any issues… they refer to this person. And that person lives in one of these neighbourhoods.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** But if that person needs any, it’s never got that far, but if the person here needs any advice, then they come to us.

**Interviewer:** Um-hmm.

**Participant:** So, most of these groups, they’re autonomous anyway.

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

**Participant:** In terms of what? What do you mean?

**Interviewer:** Urm, funds for example, access to funds -?

**Participant:** Urm, urm, urm, there have been a couple of funds made available earlier this year, not very many. We did apply for one, I forget what it’s called, I think we got two thousand from them and that was to urm… urr to cover a load of admin stuff – admin costs that we, that we had. Urm… a lot of the local organisations, food banks, urm, and so on they have their own resources. Urm, so there’s, there’s one – I mean if you look on the Facebook group, you’ll find a lot of the, a lot of these organisations, they post on the Facebook page. Urm… let me see if I can find something.

**Interviewer:** That’s okay, I can have a look.

**Participant:** Yeah, have a look, there is one called [LOCAL ORGANISATION NAME], which is a food service, they cook for and they distribute in the local community, people sign up they have their vans they have their own volunteers. Local churches as well. Urm, there was one church that – self organised as a church group and they have their own resources, people have cars, you know, that sort of thing.

**Interviewer:** You also mentioned some skills that volunteers might had?

**Participant:** Yeah so, some people have experience with urr, Samaritans. Urr, one of our coordinators is experienced in public health, my flatmate who is the other coordinator, he’s he’s got a background in in local housing. Urm, there are people volunteering who are social workers, psychologists, you know. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay. How many people were active helpers?

**Participant:** How many people, urm-

**Interviewer:** Were active. You mentioned urm… a number of people in the group were they all active? How was the –

**Participant:** Urm I would say on a day to day basis the active ones were the ward coordinators. Urm… with the neighbourhood coordinators it was more as people required help and support. Urm, I mean one of the urm ward level coordinators, she did it like a full-time job. A couple of them are councillors as well, so they were very active. Urm… the church organisers were very active as well, yeah.

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

**Participant:** No, and I think that’s the ethos of mutual aid, urm… I don’t know what it’s like outside [CITY NAME], urm… but… urm, I mean the the the [BOROUGH NAME 5] group have often reached out for help. Urm, especially when people, people who need help don’t know the the mutual aid groups exist, so you get a load of e-mail form people living urr, just across the road where we don’t cover, and you have to refer them to [BOROUGH NAME 3]. Urm… that sort of thing, but there have been people – the [BOROUGH NAME 5] coordinating were beginning… who reached out for advice, a couple of the [BOROUGH NAME 2] groups reached out as well, [BOROUGH NAME 1] too. But mostly the groups – because the other groups aren’t… urm, I don’t want to use the word centralised because it it has a different meaning, but because they weren’t urr… led by urr… organisers, they were very – they were created as autonomous organic groups, I I don’t know how urm, urm… how they’ve urm… urm, how they’re doing it. But I I noticed that the groups that do have that kind of central organising… they’re much more coordinated in terms of reaching out for help and so on.

**Interviewer:** So, you noticed that in your group?

**Participant:** Yeah, and friends for example that live in [BOROUGH NAME 3] have told me that neighbourhood groups have kind of … disintegrated into street level groups – which is fine if that’s how people, people what to do it. But I think it kind of shows what can happen if there isn’t that kind of, that initial organisation.

**Interviewer:** Okay. You mentioned that you had some contacts with other local groups, urr, can you add on a bit more abut that? What kind of what kind of groups and what kind of connection you have?

**Participant:** You mean…

**Interviewer:** For example, with any other organisations could be political organisations, community organisations?

**Participant:** Urr… yes, yes, yeah so most of them are community organisations, churches mosques, urm, youth groups, urm, local charities, the foodbank, local foodbank, urm, pharmacies. Urm at one point we were thinking of urm, approaching local supermarkets so, volunteers would have a card that they could use so rather than money being urm… handed urm over by residents, they could use urm, volunteers could use this card. Urm, what else do we have, yeah local GP groups have contacted us. I mean I had someone from [BOROUGH NAME 2] council call me a couple of months ago just to make sure because I’m in this vulnerable group - that I’m fine. And I have someone who you know, who… there to help me. And, at one point in the conversation she said, urm, urm, “your name sound familiar, are you the guy from [GROUP NAME]?” and I said, “yes, that’s me,” and we were talking urm, because there was lots of things that she didn’t know, like resources that were available for people, so she wanted that information as well and she wanted flyers that she could hand out. So, we have, I can’t think off the top of my head specific organisations but those are kind of the categories of groups that we are working with.

**Interviewer:** How was the –

**Participant:** And a lot of them actually in the beginning reached out to us. I mean my my flatmate did a lot of that work and he was saying that organisations like the food bank and other charities were saying that they don’t have the resources to cope. So, they were actually, they themselves were looking to team up with other organisations to manage whatever crisis. Urm, [CHARITY NAME 1] at the beginning was doing deliveries for elderly and vulnerable people in the community. I don’t know if they’re, if they’re still doing that. I think they are. I don’t know what they, how they resources have shifted in the last, sort of, six/seven months.

**Interviewer:** Mmm, why do you use those connections? Or was…

**Participant:** Urm, because they have urr… they have the resources and the know-how that we don’t. Urm… we were able to act as a urm… as a conduit I suppose for local residents. People that they wouldn’t be able to access – not everyone – hardly anyone for example knew that [CHARITY NAME 1] was Doing food parcels for elderly and vulnerable people. Urm… so there’s also a publicity thing. Urm, it’s kind of they helped up by having that service and we helped them by connecting them with local people and publicising that these services exist.

**Interviewer:** Hmm-hmm, and has your group tried to get official recognition?

**Participant:** No.

**Interviewer:** You didn’t discuss that?

**Participant:** Not at all, not at all. Because its its urr… I mean, okay, sorry explain what do you mean by official recognition.

**Interviewer:** Becoming a company or a charity, something like that?

**Participant:** No, not at all, not at all. No.

**Interviewer:** Why not?

**Participant:** Urm, because I, urr… I I think that would go against the mutual aid philosophy. Urm… we were careful from the very beginning and the training we gave volunteers was that we were not a government service. We were not government representatives. Urm… they shouldn’t allow themselves to be co-opted in that way. So, if there’s a volunteer that they suspect might be an illegal immigrant, it’s not their job to report them to anybody. And I think – and it is actually, when you go on the [GROUP NAME] urr, sorry the mutual aid groups website, it has a section on how mutual aid groups would interact with government organisations – they’re very very clear on that. I think if urm… mutual aid groups did go down that line they would have to – there would be a lot of co-option of principles, I think. And the, the political foundations of what mutual aid actually is – in the beginning we we did have a couple of organisations approach us, like Facebook for example, urm, approached us, we had a meeting with a couple of their employees about how social media can be used to track urm… urr request for help. Urm and the three of us sat in on that meeting and I mean we conducted the meeting, but we were very dubious about Facebook’s intentions. And then at the end of the meeting they confirmed to us, they said “we’ve been trying to contact other mutual aid groups and no one’s responded, would you be able to put us in contact with them?” And urm, I mean they wanted names and numbers, and urm, I asked them “which group have you contacted?” They said, “[BOROUGH NAME 1],” and I’m friends with the guy who started the [BOROUGH NAME 1] group and I said, and I was thinking, “well if [NAME OF FRIEND] hasn’t responded to you, there’s a reason for that. So, we’re not going to put you in contact with those people if they haven’t responded to you.”

**Interviewer:** Okay, you mentioned some philosophical– sorry – reasons connected with mutual aid, which ones very important for your groups?

**Participant:** Urm... we from the very beginning we were very clear that we were a community organisation; we’re not a local government led organisation. At the same time, we wanted urm, to protect urm, residents from you know, surveillance – we’re very strict also about GDPR training as well, and we’re very strict about how we store people’s information. We don’t share it with anybody, we don’t act as border police, we’re not here to judge people’s needs, urm, or make assumptions about their backgrounds, or why they are or why they’re, they need help. I think if we had gone down the line of registering ourselves as a company and doing it in that sort of,… charity or whatever and doing it in that sort of official way, there are loads of things that we would not have been able to do. And also, with a lot of communities, especially migrants and refugees, you lose the trust as well.

**Interviewer:** And you work a lot with them, yeah?

**Participant:** Yeah. We have, we have – I mean in [CONSTITUENCY NAME] we have a lot of migrant and refugee residents, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay, you talk a little bit about your motivations for getting involved, and in your opinion, what are the motivations for other active participants?

**Participant:** Urm… I think, I mean the… all the central organisers and coordinators are [POLITICAL PARTY] activists, so… we’re all socialists – that’s the motivations, I don’t know how else to explain it. I mean I can talk about empathy, a sense of helping the community and all of these sort of platitudes, but it just comes back down to being socialists.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** That’s all it comes down to. It comes down to being socialists and realising how much the urm, the Tory government has urm, urr… fucked up the economy, fucked up the NHS, fucked up local serves, public services that - in the last ten years we had a crisis in the NHS *because* of the Tory government, there is not any other reason, its because of the Tory government. Local councils, urm… services were stretched because of COVID *because* of austerity. Urm… people had to rely on foodbank that were already stretched *because* of austerity, because of the Tory government. So that’s what it falls down to. And urm, a lot of people naturally that got involved, was because of that.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** They knew that, you know, the old woman or the old man who lives down the road – what are they going to do? You know. I I can’t speak to why individuals joined, urm… but those are the reasons why we set up the group.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Because we’re socialists.

**Interviewer:** Urm… and how about problems that your – that the group may have faced during this time? For example-

**Participant:** Such as what?

**Interviewer:** Has involvement in the group meant a lot of time and effort form you, from the others?

**Participant:** Yeah, in the beginning it was urm… it was urm a twenty-four-hour job, setting up the neighbourhoods, recruiting volunteers, training material, onboarding etc, etc. It was urr, my flat mate and I, I would work during the day and he would work during the night. Urr, answering e-mails. I think if we went back and did it all over again, urm… we would have urm, the central organising people in place and allocate duties in a much more urr… much clearer way. But because we’d never done this before, we made a lot of mistakes in the beginning. Urm-

**Interviewer:** What kind of –

**Participant:** So, another – so the the neighbourhoods for example. What we… in the beginning – and also, we didn’t have, have as much confidence as we developed during the process. So, in the beginning urm… the map of the neighbourhoods didn’t look like that map, the divisions were much smaller, until we realised that its much easer to have urr bigger neighbourhood groups with more volunteers than you know, street by street, you know, little things like that. But once we reached out to urm… to our [POLITICAL PARTY] colleagues who also have experience in community organising and so on, urm, and they came with their own skills and their own experiences, things got a lot easier.

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

**Participant:** Volunteers you mean?

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Participant:** I’m sure, I’m sure. In the beginning there was this fervour to help, urm… but that goes up and down. So, it may be over Christmas that we get a lot more. But yes, I’m sure, I mean I don’t keep track in each group of how many volunteers are active. Because they are volunteers, we can’t, if people want to drop out, they can drop out, it’s not – they’re not under any contract. So, we don’t need to keep figures, figures like that. But yes, I’m pretty sure volunteer numbers have gone down since –

**Interviewer:** And coordinators?

**Participant:** Urr, no actually, coordinators were in place, Ward level coordinators are in place. And usually a - we did, we did have a couple of coordinators not drop out but just say that, they took on more responsibility than they thought it would be. They can’t balance it with family and work and so on. Which is fine, they’re not under any obligation or contract. But usually they’ll come with, you know, there’s another volunteer in the group who does have the time. So, you know, there’s no kind of period where the group isn’t being coordinated by someone.

**Interviewer:** Mmm, and what kind of things have you done that might – that have helped the group keep going?

**Participant:** Urm… so, we we also have urm a coordinators group on Facebook, where coordinators can share ideas and problems with each other. And they have done actually, its just, it’s just a group for coordinators so urm… urm the last time I went on there there were some coordinators who had problems with… urm… residents who persistent residents – you know they ask for help, and then something happens and they keep asking for help and you realise that sometimes the relationship bas become a bit exploitative. This is something as well, you know, in any kind of volunteering like this, you know, the person who’s providing the service can… the relationship itself can become exploitative. So, seeing advice from other coordinators how to deal with that. Urm, and volunteers and if urr, urr coordinators need help in what services are out there – something they don’t know, like they’ve never had experience in something. Urm… they’re they’re there to advise and support each other – things like that.

We found in the beginning, after – sorry after the… and the idea for this group came from one of the coordinators, and we found that it’s much easier for coordinators to share their experiences with each other to see what’s worked and what’s happened, sharing best practice and experience and what have you, than have it kind of drip fed by us.

**Interviewer:** Um-hmm, and do you have regular meetings for example, also?

**Participant:** Not so much now, because after we set up the ward coordinators it’s much easer to speak to ward coordinators than – you know, we have eighty groups over eighty groups, that’s eighty coordinators, that’s a lot of coordinators to have regular meetings with. So it’s much easer to have that, to do that with the war coordinators because there is only one, two, three, four – sorry, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven - seven ward coordinators so it’s much easier to have meetings with them and then information gets passed on to coordinators.

**Interviewer:** Um-hmm, and from those things that you mentioned, were any of this strategic?

**Participant:** I think that as we were going through it we realised how much work we were taking on. So, it was more kind of like a conductive strategy rather than something we realised from the beginning, so it was more kind of hindsight, okay. I think we kind of got eighty groups that we need to manage – three people can’t do this. Urm… and… so it was much easier to – so [NAME OF FLAT MATE] my flat mate came up with the idea of ward coordinators. So, that was a strategy in hindsight. I mean that is was kind of – this goes back to the mistakes that we made or you know, things that we could have done better, but we couldn’t because we didn’t have experience of this before.

**Interviewer:** Mmm, okay, what kind of things would you do differently?

**Participant:** We, well from the very beginning urr we would have had it with, as this structure, ward level coordinator and then the groups and so on. It was - I mean we also found that trying to coordinate communication between… with the different groups was becoming very difficult and it was becoming very slow.

**Interviewer:** Mmm.

**Participant:** So, it was much easier to do it in this, in this kind of way. And the aim of the group is to have urm, urr, urr a quick response to requests for help, so the other way that wasn’t working. So, it was much easier to have local contact points rather than people e-mail or call the central group and then we allocate volunteers on that basis. It was much easier to do it on a local basis- from the resident’s point of view.

**Interviewer:** Okay, urm, have you learnt something from coordinating this group?

**Participant:** Urm, yeah, urm… volunteer management, onboarding, learning a bit more about GDPR. Urm… the urm, learning more about things like mental health issues. Community care, what resources are available in the neighbourhood. I mean I’ve only been living in [CONSTITUENCY NAME] since June 2019, so its just a year and half. So, I didn’t really know the neighbourhood. I can’t say that I know the neighbourhood after a year and half, that’s impossible, I think. But I think I know it a lot better. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Anything about yourself as well?

**Participant:** Urm…I always find the questions difficult to answer, one of the things I’ve discovered is I’d really like to go into mental health social work. As a social worker, work in community care. Yeah that’s one of the big things.

**Interviewer:** Why?

**Participant:** Urm… because it, it ties in with my values of social justice, you know neighbours looking after neighbours, you know anti-oppressive practices, etc. yeah.

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

**Participant:** … It’s difficult to say. Urm… we knew from the beginning that the lockdown was going to be much longer than the government was saying, and that is the case now. Urm… so, hopefully the group will keep running and volunteers will keep active as long as there is a lockdown. But because they’re volunteers, you know, they’re not under any contract, you can’t, you can’t hold on to them. So that’s the only thing that we can hope for.

**Interviewer:** Um-hmm, but you have a plan for the group to keep going even after COVID?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Maybe, I, I, I, I don’t know about after COVID. I, I I don’t know what people will be doing after COVID, you know the other organisers may have other commitments, so… students, some of the coordinators are students so they may not be in [CITY NAME] anymore. Urm, so we don’t know about after COVID but definitely as long as there’s a lockdown this -the group will continue.

**Interviewer:** And you? Your role in the group, how do you see it?

**Participant:** Urm, my role has always been on there volunteer side, so I think that will continue.

**Interviewer:** Um-hmm.

**Participant:** So urm, coordinating volunteers, training, etc, etc.,

**Interviewer:** Okay. Actually I - okay, so I think I don’t have any more questions.

**[Debriefing]**

**[End of Interview]**