**Date: 10/12/2020**

**Duration:** 01:08:01

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

Do you have any questions before we start?

**Participant:** No, I’m happy, let’s get into it.

**Interviewer:** So, my first question is if you could tell me the name of the group?

**Participant:** Urr, [GROUP NAME].

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

**Participant:** It was the 15th March 2020.

**Interviewer:** Okay, how, how did it start?

**Participant:** Urr, it was basically me and my partner just wanted to help neighbours. Urm, and within a couple of days we were sort of covering more than just our neighbours. We basically went from covering the small part of [AREA NAME 1] where we were based to part of [unclear 00:48] and the whole of south [TOWN NAME 1].

**Interviewer:** Mmm.

**Participant:** And yeah, we we didn’t sort of intend to start like a community or mutual aid group, it just happened, and its one of them one’s sort of, once you’re in it you’ve just got to carry on, you can’t really stop because there’s people in need. So yeah, we just we grew out of pretty much nothing, so it’s just random sort of helping hand if that makes sense?

**Interviewer:** Yes, so it was you and your partner urm, just, or did you have any, who was involved besides you and your partner?

**Participant:** So, initially it was me and my partner and then we had sort of the odd, sort of helper now and again sort of help with delivery of… oh-

**Interviewer:** Sorry.

**Participant:** Oh no, its alright.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Participant:** We had the odd sort of help with delivery but… because at the beginning we thought that lockdown was only going to last two weeks, we didn’t really think about putting loads of effort into making it a proper group of that makes sense? So, we had the odd little bits of help from the community with regards to donations or delivery and things to people in need, sort of various different tasks. And then, and so, it wasn’t really a structured approach if that makes sense, and then as we sort of carried on, we then built a group of volunteers, but that’s only sort of been within the past… four months I’d say, that we’ve had a structured approach to it. Because we then decided to register as a Community Interest Company to continue it full time in the future.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So, has something changed since it started, could you tell me a little bit more about the process?

**Participant:** Yeah. So, I’ve seen, when we first started, we were, it basically started with toilet roll. That sounds quite crazy but obviously there was a massive shortage of toilet rolls and there were elderly people or vulnerable people or people who can’t even get to the shops who had no chance of getting any of the bare human essentials. And we basically thought, well we had access to them at a business only wholesalers and we started with like a cost price model if that makes sense? So, most groups would go to the shops and do shopping for people, what we decided to do was go directly to the wholesalers where the shops buy their stock from, purchase it and then provide it to those in need at sort of the wholesale price. So, it was not only obviously cheaper for those in need during such a bad time of people losing jobs, but it also means we had a steady supply of the essentials that people needed.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** And that obviously took off because people needed it. So, we made, we’ve made zero profit from all of this from day one. And as we went along, we then started noticing people needed help with food and they literally couldn’t afford anything. So then we thought, right, I think in south [TOWN NAME 1] there is… one maybe two foodbanks at a push and then foodbanks only operate one or twice a week for a few hours. And we were staying it’s it’s not enough for the demand that’s there, its nowhere near enough. So, we basically decided to do a delivery only foodbank that operates seven days a week. And at the beginning it was tough because it was – in terms of full commitment it was only me and my partner. So, we had the odd few other volunteers but there was no structured approach. But sort of following on from that now, we are still running seven days a week with a group of twenty-odd volunteers.

**Interviewer:** Twenty.

**Participant:** But we take the flexible approach. So, most charities will say, “if you want to volunteer you can do Friday’s between twelve and three.” And volunteers are tied down too much with that. So, the approach that we took was basically… “if you want to volunteer, that’s great, join up with us, obviously we’ll do the due-diligence and check you, etc, etc.” And then we literally put them in a WhatsApp group and whenever we need help delivering some parcels or any help to people in need, we basically drop the urr, the task into the group a whoever’s free at the time can pick it up and take it. So, it, it’s, I think talking to other charities or sort of other groups in the area, I think they’re sort of adopting the model that we’ve took of being more flexible. Urr because I think, especially now more than even people don’t have much time, but they want to help. And I think the more you tie people down, the less response you’re going to get. So, we’ve basically grew from literally two people providing toilet roll, urr right through to seven day a week foodbank social supermarket, with twenty odd volunteers, we’ve moved unit three times because we keep growing. Urr we’ve won funding – as I say, we’ve registered as a Community Interest Company in June-

**Interviewer:** Why did you decide to do that?

**Participant:** Sorry?

**Interviewer:** Why did you decide to become a charity company?

**Participant:** Well, because there is only two foodbanks in the area and, like I say, they operate on a very part time basis. Urr, we thought okay, people need us now, but do they need us in the future. And when we spoke to the local authority which is [TOWN NAME 1] Council, they they couldn’t sort of stop praising what we were doing. Urr for the simple fact the local council joined up with [CHARITY NAME 1] to provide food parcels to those in need. And the council actually turned around to us and admitted that we’d managed to do a better job, bearing in mind we’ve never done it before. So, the local council basically turned around and said, “look, we’re going to need you in the future because, yeah, COVID will disappear but the long-term effects are still going to be there, the recession the credit crunch then Brexit as well. It’s not going to be looking good for the next few years at least.” Urr, so the government actually supported us, so the council supported us in getting registered urm and sort of choosing the right model that fits. So, we decide to become a CIC rather than a urr like a CIO or a charity. For the simple fact that you can’t rely on funding, purely funding. Urr, because urr because we’re seven days a week and eventually we, our costs are going to grow more and more we need a bit of guaranteed money coming in. So, we decided on a CIC model but also create, because obviously as you know a CIC is a non-profit side and then a profit-making side. So, our profit-making side is going to be making gifts, like providing personalised gifts which will obviously create jobs for the community, but also create the profit to run the non-profit as a while.

**Interviewer:** Okay, sorry are you there?

**Participant:** Yeah, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay, urm… have you had any previous experience or organising groups like this one?

**Participant:** No, never, no. No never done anything like this before in the past. Urr, I think… the thing which probably made it work is I’m quite driven. So, I don’t give up very easy and if I want something, I get it. My partner would probably agree. So, when we sort of started it, realised that its going to carry on we, I… we had no choice to be fair and I sort of sat down and went, “look, I’m going to have research CICs and CIOs and how to manage people and how to do this and how to do that,” and I had to do that to discipline myself to just learn it. And luckily enough, because we’ve got… urm… there’s a company called [COMPANY NAME 1] which is the [COMPANY NAME 1], and you’ve got [ORGANISATION NAME 1], which is kind of [TOWN NAME 1] Councils urr… voluntary sector department. And sort of combined with them two along with a lot of Google research, I actually managed to sort of clue myself up on what would be the best route to take and how to do it. I, but don’t get me wrong, I’d still probably say 60% of what we’d done we’ve sort of had to wing it, because we haven’t had the time to sort of sit back and sort of research if it’s going to work what we want to implement. We’ve sort of had to say, “lets take an educated risk and give it our best shot.” And luckily so far, nothing failed yet. Urm, as we grow, there’s still a lot to sort of learn and a lot to put in place. Urr but we’ve we’ve changed a hell of a lot since the beginning. So right at the beginning when people needed help, they would send me a personal message on Facebook messenger, and I’d write it in a little notebook and then –

**Partner:** [unclear 11:25].

**Participant:** Yeah, towards the end of the day we urr, got out in the car and sort of do it all with the iPad on my partners lap trying to figure out where we were going, going around in circles. Whereas now urr, the good, the joys of it is I’m a [OCCUPATION NAME] by day, so I’ve got all the technical skills. So, what we do now is, we’re basically trying to make it sort of less, I don’t know, less embarrassing to ask for help. So, if people don’t want human contact, that’s perfectly fine, we can do it completely online, they literally go to the website, fill out a form request a, say a food parcel for example, that automatically gets put into like a system. That sends them an e-mail to like to confirm we’ve received it. And then through the whole process of the parcel being packed and the parcel being out out for delivery and the food parcel actually being delivered, they’re notified all the way. Whereas what was happening before, we started with scraps of paper and then we had an online form but then we had to manually transfer it into another system, but now the whole workflow is all automated.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** So, we’re basically trying to make it as easy as possible. Obviously not only for ourselves because I do like, like now we can get home an hour earlier on the evenings, because we’re not doing so much admin work. But we are trying to sort of make it more of like, like the, the new generation of foodbank if that makes sense. Because I think a lot of foodbanks are now sort of trapped in their old ways.

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

**Participant:** Urr yeah, everything. We me and my partner still sort of do everything and we are looking to sort of split it up a bit and have sort of more full-time volunteers if they want to and delegate a little bit more and give other people responsibility. But the thing is, we’re busier now than we were in the middle of lockdown.

**Interviewer:** Really?

**Participant:** We don’t, we, because it works, we don’t want to change it and break anything. So, we don’t want to try and move things around now and then it actually affects the community.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** But the good thing is, well I say it’s a good, it’s not a good thing, my partner lost her job urr because of COVID urr but because she’s still unemployed at the moment, it has meant that she’s had more time to get things done. So, we are, so we have applied for some kick-started from the government so we could have three… that is like 18-24-year olds funded by the government so obviously it gives them a job but also gives us more, more help if that makes sense. Because the… the most, I say, the most strenuous part of what we do is actually packing the food parcels. That’s that’s want takes the most time, delivery is quite easy because you just set a nice circle route and then follow it. But it’s the actual packing of the food parcels that takes the time. So, we are looking at starting to branch out and hand things out so we – not necessarily do less, but so we can try and focus on making it even better.

**Interviewer:** Okay, you already mentioned that, but how does the activity that you do in the group relates with other parts of your life? How do you fit everything, you said that you are [OCCUPATION 1], right?

**Participant:** Urr, [OCCUPATION 1], yeah.

**Interviewer:** How do you fit everything at this moment, and also in the past when you started?

**Participant:** How did we fit it into the day?

**Interviewer:** Yes, how do you fit everything in your life, how do you fit the activities that you do in the group in your life?

**Partner:** Early mornings, late nights, [unclear: 15:46].

**Participant:** Yeah, it’s literally no personal time, we’d wake up at six a.m. go to bed at like one a.m. two a.m. and do that seven days a week. Now the thing is and this is not a shot at people who are older than me, but, we’re only 21 so we’ve got like, we should be out clubbing, obviously not during, but people our age are usually out clubbing until one, two three o’clock in the morning, we’ve never been clubbing we’re not interested in doing any of that. So luckily, we’ve got the energy to do it. Don’t get me wrong some days I’ve woke up and didn’t want to get out of bed, but we’ve had to, we’ve got no choice.

**Interviewer:** And why did you – why did you decide to do it, in the first place?

**Participant:** We saw on our, so we’re, we’ve got a little local Facebook group for our sort of area so the [CONSTITUENCY NAME 1] residence Facebook group. And we saw a few people on there saying, “oh, I’m housebound at the moment, I can’t get out, the shops have no stock left and I can’t even get like most basic thing.” And then… when we went to the local wholesalers because I already had an account with them, I noticed that they had toilet roll. And the other thing was, and to be honest this was probably what started it, there was a lot of shops… over pricing things. So, like the hand sanitiser thing, you’d usually get it for quid a bottle, they were trying to charge £20 a bottle. So… it was… to put it lightly it was kind of a middle finger to the business that were trying to take advantage of such a bad situation. And… we thought, yeah let’s just help a few people in our community but as I said it just grew and grew and grew and now, we cover quite a large area when you look at it on a map.

**Interviewer:** How big is it? Urr -

**Participant:** Its huge.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, can you tell me a little bit more about the area the group has covered?

**Participant:** Yeah so, we cover, I suppose it would be classed as…most of South East [CITY NAME 1]. So… I’m not sure if you know?

**Interviewer:** I know [CITY NAME 1] yes, I loved there for a while, yeah.

**Participant:** Oh brilliant. So, it’s sort of the [AREA NAME 2], [AREA NAME 3], [AREA NAME 1], [AREA NAME 3], [AREA NAME 4] area. So, I say south east, vaguely correct, and then literally everything from [AREA NAME 3] down in [TOWN NAME 1], so the whole of south [TOWN NAME 1] we cover. Urm, the only part we don’t cover is [AREA NAME 5] and [AREA NAME 6], is it?

**Partner:** [Unclear: 18:53].

**Participant:** Yeah, like [AREA NAME 5], [AREA NAME 6], [AREA NAME 7] sort of side of [TOWN NAME 1] we don’t cover. Because if we did we wouldn’t have the man power and to be fair, because north [TOWN NAME 1] is quite a deprived area anyway, they’ve already got support networks up there, so we don’t feel the need to overstretch ourselves. Because they’ve got, they’ve already got multiple, I think there’s about fifteen groups in north [TOWN NAME 1].

**Interviewer:** Fifteen, okay. Urm, and can you explain me a little bit more the kind of things the groups do?

**Participant:** Yes, so at the beginning it was, as I said the sort of cost priced essentials, your toilet rolls, your shower gels, your toothpaste, sort of things like that. Urm, and then we moved onto free food parcels as well, for people who literally couldn’t afford anything. And we were also, we were trying, we were trailing doing like prescription collections, we’d done some supermarket collections for people, if they did manage to get a slot. Urm, what else did we do? Trying to think back now. It was just general tasks; I think we’d done a couple of post office runs for people who wanted to send letters to other family. We had quite a mix and I think we we trialled everything and sort of settles with the two, the cost price essentials and food bank. Purely because… they’re easier to manage and… the need for them is greater. Because most pharmacies, we know it’s, at the beginning, no pharmacies were delivering. But I think now, the majority of pharmacies in our area are doing deliveries. So, but the time we’re tried doing all the admin work to arrange collections for specific times, it was never going to work. So, we sort of just let them drift off and do their own thing if that makes sense?

**Interviewer:** Yeah, and how often do the people in the group do these things? Is it every day, every week?

**Participant:** Every day.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Participant:** It is, it’s a constant mission every day.

**Partner:** [unclear 21:22].

**Participant:** Yeah, pretty much 24/7. So, I will usually go to bed at about midnight wake up in the morning and see quite a lot of e-mails and notes that have come in overnight. Urm, so what we tend to do is spend sort of the morning, until around about, I’d say until about two, three o’clock maybe, I say morning, morning/early afternoon so about two/three o’clock sort of get everything ready and prepared and then the volunteers will come and pick up what they need to and then take them out and deliver.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** But that is, I think we’ve only ever had one day where we’ve not had a request, or anything like that. And I don’t know why, but… because I was expecting to see like a steady decline and then it would go to nothing. But it wasn’t, we were really busy and then one day we had nothing and then it got really busy again. So, I think… I can’t see it slow it down any time soon.

**Interviewer:** Even with, you didn’t notice any change even in the second lockdown? No?

**Participant:** I think to be honest –

**Partner**: [unclear 22:34].

**Participant:** Yeah, we’d got a lot busier, when was it? urm… the half term. Do you know the free school meals stuff that went on with the government?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Participant:** We noticed a massive peak that week. Urm, because we committed to basically saying, look, any child that does not have a meal, we will sort it out. Whether that’s a food parcel, I don’t know a McDonalds voucher, I don’t know, we said we will make sure you have food. And as I said, because we’re one of only a couple of support networks within South [TOWN NAME 1], we were inundated with requests. Urm, so we… it got… we were really busy at the beginning of the first lockdown, stayed busy, when the lockdown easing was announced, it dropped a little bit, but not a lot, sat at that level and then when we hit the half term for the school meals, it shot straight back up again. I think now it’s sort of levelled down to about the same, if that makes sense. So, it’s sort of sitting quite happy. But… I, I think, I can see within the next couple of weeks, we’re probably going to notice it going back up again. Urm –

**Interviewer:** Because Christmas…

**Participant:** There’s a lot more job cuts going on at the moment as well.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and you mention that you have twenty-one volunteers, right?

**Participant:** Urr I think its twenty… is it yeah about twenty volunteers at the moment.

**Interviewer:** And how many are active helpers?

**Participant:** I think all of them isn’t it? Yeah nearly-

**Partner:** [unclear: 24:25].

**Participant:** Yeah, near enough all of them, we don’t see, obviously we don’t see all of them every day. Urm… but we typically see them all at least once a week. Because, obviously because we’re flexible, urm… and it, it all depends as well because some of our volunteers will take on one or two sort of tasks, others will turn around and say, yeah I’ll take all the tasks for [POSTCODE 1], [POSTCODE 2] and [POSTCODE 3]. So obviously that takes quite a big chunk of the tasks up, so we only need one person. Urr, it it fluctuates a lot to be fair.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and how did you get volunteers involved?

**Participant:** Facebook. Urr Facebook has been the drive from day one, if we didn’t have Facebook, we wouldn’t have what we have now. Urm… I think as much as people slag Facebook off, I think it’s probably been the life saver throughout COVID. Urm because… we…we trailed delivery leaflets, I think we dropped 30,000 leaflets across out areas and… when people ask for help, it’s asks them, “where did you hear about us?” and I think maybe 4% said leaflet. The rest of them said Facebook. So… yeah, I think we won’t be doing leaflets again, it’s not worth the money.

**Partner:** Word of mouth as well.

**Participant:** Yeah, word of mouth but the council publicised us a lot as well.

**Interviewer:** And how did you identify people in need?

**Participant:** So… most food, most of the foodbanks or sort of similar organisations to us will do sort of quite vigorous checks on people. So… they will they require like referral from like a doctor or a social worker or something along the lines of that. And then they sort of look into them, they check with other foodbanks to see if they are sort of mugging the system off. And we found that it delays the process by typically about a week. And the problem is, say for example, by the time they finish their checks it’s a Friday, but the foodbank doesn’t open again until the next Thursday, you’ve then got basically a whole of a week to wait before you can get any help. So, we, we were talking with other foodbanks and we said, “look, if you compare the cost of doing all your checks, compared to the cost of food parcels that will go to people who have played the system. You’ll find that you’re actually wasting money.” So, the one example, and I don’t want to slag them off, but the [CHARITY NAME 2], the hundreds and thousands that they spend on admin work… checking every single applicant out, well, let’s say for example if, they average around about two percent of requests are false, so out of a hundred food parcels, you’ve got two food parcels that have gone to people who’ve mugged the system off. What’s that? A tenners worth of food, which has probably been donated anyway. But instead, they’re spending hundreds of thousands and putting how many man hours into checking each person. So, we basically said, look, it’s done on trust… and to be fair I think we’ve only had, that we’ve caught, we’ve only had one person… sort of trying to take advantage. But I think you can tell… you can tell if they’re taking advantage, the way they talk to you the way they react and so, how grateful they are as well. Because even the grumpiest person alive if you’re in need and you’re given food, you’ll still say thank you. Urr but you can always tell when you’ve got that one person who’s trying to take advantage. But we just say, look we’re here to help not to hinder, so if you need help you will get help, and it will be same day, push it maybe next day that you get your food parcel. There’s no waiting two weeks.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and in terms of resources, what resources do you have? You mentioned some funds urm…?

**Participant:** Yeah so, we’ve, at first we were running from donations from the community – no sorry from the very beginning we were running out of my back pocket. Which so disappeared, so then we started getting donations form the community which sort of fuelled us quite well, didn’t it? Because as soon as one person donated, another person donated. And then we had other local groups, so we had a local children’s mental health charities who had to stop one of their activities that was funded by the national lottery, so they turned around to us and said, “look, we’ll give you some of our funding as a donation.” And then we had the local round table urm donate I think it was £800 to us to help us put fuel in the car to deliver. And then another reason for registering as well was not only were we pressured to, but it meant we could access funding. So, we could also open ourselves up to national lottery funding, government funding, council funding. And when we registered in June and then, when was it? September? I think it was mid-September, urm we actually won a grant of £10,000 from the National Lottery, which goes on funding the unit we use to urr… sort of run the operations from as well as a small pot for all our volunteer expenses a bit of equipment, little bits and bobs. Like we bought some CCTV for the unit urr, paid for the insurance for the year a bit of rent. Basically, we were trying to pay off as many recurring bills as we can.

Urr… but yeah, the in terms of sort of physical assets, sort of physical resources we don’t really have that many. So, I’m still using my own personal car, but I suppose its got to be used for something. Urm… but the plan is sort of maybe in the future is maybe have a couple of, I say fleet vehicles, but it sounds too commercial… urm but like a couple of vehicles and, I don’t know, maybe they’re end of lease and we could probably haggle them form the lease company, I don’t know. Urm… but try, try and sort of become self-sustained. Whereby if we have volunteers who have a licence but can’t drive - or like, don’t have car, sorry, they could help.

The the long-term plan is to… be sufficient with funding not only with funders but also self-generated. Still community-based, don’t become too corporate if that makes sense, but also just create local jobs as well. So, even if that means that we have people in the future, like say we have volunteers now, but they want to do it all the time, we could possibly, depend on how much money we could generate, sort of employ them to do, like deliver food parcels full time. Because as speaking with the local council, they said it’s only ever going to get worse at the moment. So, we kind of need to think about making things a lot more permeant and future proof.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned a couple of times the council, how is the relationship with the local council?

**Participant:** It depends which department \*laughs\*. Urr so we… we typically trend to communicate with the community development team. Urm… and they basically keep the, it’s basically a couple of people per district of [TOWN NAME 1], and they will sort of keep an eye on what’s going on and sort of organise things, coordinate different things and basically, it’s like a, they’re like councillors but they’ve got more power, if that makes sense. And they were basically set-up because I think they were actually set up because of COVID, and it was basically, “look, you go and manage that area, and you keep an eye on the community groups and sort of organise things.” So, we, we tend to deal with them quite regularly, and to be fair they’ve done an absolutely cracking job. I don’t think they actually get paid either, so they’re actually volunteers. Urm, they they’ve been absolutely brilliant.

Other department son the other hand, urm… the shielding teams, so most councils obviously set up shielding teams, urm, the [TOWN NAME 1] Council shielding team, they were brilliant so… when we started picking up the slack from the council’s foodbank responses because as they admitted we were doing a better job. Urr they actually communicated quite well with us, and they were quite helpful in, because it was basically, “you scratch our back, we’ll scratch yours.” So, because we’re helping them out with their foodbank response, they basically helped us with any advice, guidance kind of thing that we needed. But then other areas of the council such as the parking team, seem to hate us.

**Interviewer:** Why?

**Participant:** Because we at someone, we borrowed a unit in [AREA NAME 8] which is in South [TOWN NAME 1], urr we were borrowed it for a couple of months. And unfortunately, where you unload there was double yellows. And you have to get a parking permit if you want to unload there. So, I spoke to the community development team and they were like, “yeah, it’s not a problem, you should get one because you’re sort of doing our job, call the parking team and ask for a permit.” Called them, called them, called then, never got back to me. And in the end, I said, “look, we can’t stop delivering parcels because they can’t be bothered to pick up the phone,” so I’m going to have to risk it and risk getting a ticket. So, parked there, lo and behold get a ticket, so I appeal it, no answer, so appeal it, get another ticket, so I appeal it, no answer, go to the councillors the MP head of the council… still haven’t had a response, and now they’re threatening me with court. Urr, so, yeah parts of the council have been brilliant. Other parts, and I don’t think… because obviously, because the council outsource their parking services to an external company, I don’t think it’s necessarily the council doing it on purpose, but I think they need to get their act together a bit and sort it out, because it is a bit disheartening. And at one point we did just turn around to each other and said, “shall we just give it up?” because its just adding even more stress onto a stressful day. But no, on the whole the councils been, yeah, they’ve been –

**Partner:** [unclear 36:46].

**Participant:** Yeah, that is one thing they, until now, [TOWN NAME 1] council haven’t supplied any funding what-soever. So, like [CITY NAME 1] city Council, they turned around to all their voluntary groups and said, “look, this funding is available from day one and this scheme will go on continuously basically until we’ve run out of money to give you.” [TOWN NAME 1] council, nothing. Urr, they were given money from the government to give out to local groups etc and… but every time I’ve asked for something they were like, “yeah, yeah, we’re working on it,” and they’ve literally released it within the past few weeks, I think. So that was a bit… I think that was a bit naughty of them to be fair. But… unfortunately –

**Partner:** [unclear 37:34].

**Participant:** Yeah, if we had that a few months earlier it, we’d probably be double, triple the size we are now. That held us back quite a lot, because the council funding’s obviously easier to get hold of, because the council know what we’re doing. Whereas the national lottery, they take longer to fund because they have to research what you’re doing. But, yeah, no, on the whole they’ve been okay, and the are getting better and I think they’re learning from their mistakes. Because whenever the council ask me, “what could we do better?” I don’t hold back. I tell them as it is and I sort of make them feel stupid. And I think, but to be honest, I think its worked because if you take, at the beginning I used to take the softly softly approach of, “oh yeah, it’ve been good if you’d done this, it’ve been good if you done that,” they don’t listen. If you turn around and say, “you haven’t done this, and look what its caused,” they tend to click on. And I think now, we’re in touch with the local development team a lot more regularly, and they’re actually starting to listen to what we needed and set it up. Albeit eight months too late, but better late than never I suppose.

**Interviewer:** And it wasn’t like that in the beginning in the first lockdown?

**Participant:** No, at at the beginning they wouldn’t listen. The, the, most of the councillors went into hiding, the MPs went into hiding, I couldn’t get hold of any of them. Urr, the council just whenever you tell them something, they’ll make out that they’re already working on it, but it never produces. And then when sort of that lockdown eased and I think the council got a little bit back to normal, urr, I had a series of phone calls with the local development team, and I basically grilled them and said, “look, okay yeah, lockdown’s eased, but I can guarantee it will be back again,” and obviously I was right. And I think he took it back to the council and they’ve actually listened, because most of the things that I’ve said to them, they see to actually be doing.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Urm, what kind of things are they doing now?

**Participant:** So, it was… urr, more support for the local residence in terms of… sign posting where people can go for help. Urr funding for local groups; urr getting the councillors to actually get involved and getting the MPs to actually respond to issues. Urm and also just sort of…. Generally being there as the council, if that makes sense. Its sort of like, if you call the council for any issue, you expect a response. But obviously during COVID no one was getting answers from any departments. And we said to them, “look, just because there’s COVID, you can’t just stop your gov – your council. You’ve still got to respond to people.” And I think… now their signposting through like weekly newsletters, its plastered over Facebook, there’s funding there, people have noticed and increase in response from the council as well, in terms of answering questions, calls, etc. And all round they are getting there, but its just frustrating that it took, well what eight months, nine months to do.

**Interviewer:** And urr how is the relationship with other groups locally?

**Participant:** Yeah so, we, we get on very well. Urr obviously as we are a new foodbank as such, we’re a new group. Urr we pass tips onto other groups, and they pass their tips onto us. So… obviously it its good for them to see how the new organisations do it, but obviously it’s good for us to see how the old organisations do it. Urm, but the one thing that we’ve set up with the community development team is the [TOWN NAME 1] foodbank network. That is basically, it it covers the whole of north and south [TOWN NAME 1], but all of the foodbanks within the area… are actually part of this little network and team and we have monthly Zoom calls, we stay in touch via WhatsApp chats etc, and we basically share ideas urr, anyone needs help, we help each other. Because obviously we’re all in it, we’re all in it for the same aim, at the end of the day. Obviously, we’re not here to sort of put each other out of business. We’re all here to provide support to the community. So, I, I’d say the relationship with other foodbanks couldn’t be better.

**Interviewer:** And you mentioned that you do things differently, you coordinate, how do you coordinate, organise?

**Participant:** We are, so in terms of doing things differently compared to other foodbanks, we’re very digital. So, most foodbanks will require you to phone up or visit them and, as I said, the whole process it’s quite slow. Whereas with us, its literally, go to our website… it clearly tells you how to request a food parcel some help etc. You literally fill in a form, within a couple of seconds you get an e-mail to confirm it and that goes straight into the system for us to just sort out. Whereas obviously other foodbanks it’s very manual still. So, we, the way we operate, I’d say is a lot more effective than other foodbanks which has meant we’ve been able to cover a lot more people.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And is the group in contact with national network? Any national network or national group, movement, something like that?

**Participant:** No, we, we want to keep it small if that makes sense. So, at one point, at the very beginning, because I didn’t have a clue what we were doing, because we’d never done anything like this before, I was looking at like joining up with [CHARITY NAME 2], to become a [CHARITY NAME 2] foodbank. But then you’re paying two thousand pounds a year just to use their name. And… yeah, literally they they, okay they publicise you, but you don’t need to be on a national website because… we’ll you’re not going to have someone from [COUNTRY NAME] requesting something from [TOWN NAME 1], are you? Urm… I think… we want to keep it community based because whenever anyone now sees mine or my partners name on Facebook, they turn around and go, “oh yeah, that’s that couple of [CONSTITUENCY NAME 1] who set up this group and is still doing it etc,” we’re quite known. Or the point where-

**Partner:** [unclear 44:53].

**Participant:** Yeah, I went to the local shop and we’re actually getting recognised by people in the community. And don’t get me wrong, I don’t care if they recognise me or not, but… I think it’s the way I want to keep it because it means that people know us, we’ve stayed local, we’re not… sort of grown too big for our boots if that makes sense?

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Participant:** And I think if we were to grow, then great, but it would be a case of taking one step at a time, so the next step of growth would probably be move down to [COUNTY NAME 1] a little bit more. Because although sort of [COUNTY NAME 1], [TOWN NAME 2] area is a more upper-class sort of richer area, there’s still people who struggle. Urm… but as I say, it’ll be very small steps at at time, and nothing, we don’t want to be going on a national level.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** I think that the most sort of national sort of things we’ve done is we’ve been on the radio, we’ve been on the TV, we’re been in newspapers…

**Partner:** [unclear 46:03].

**Participant:** Oh yeah, we reached the news in Australia as well at one point.

**Interviewer:** Really?

**Participant:** I don’t know how! Urm… but that, that’s the most I’ll do, if they want to mention our name that’s fine, but in terms of joining national movements and… linking up with nationwide sort of names or brands or anything like that, we’re not interested.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and in terms of skills, urr particular skills that people in the group have, urm?

**Participant:** So, I’m the techie one, you’re really, well my partner’s really good at fitting loads of food into a box, I don’t know how you do it! Urm, her packing skills are second to none now, brilliant. To be honest I think, yeah, I’m the technical one and I’m the one who sort of does the admin work and sort of putting things in place and the processes, manage the money and everything like that. My partner is good at spending money, my my partners good at sort of, I suppose the more face-to-face contact, albeit at a distance; the packing of the food parcels, the getting supplies in etc. Urm, the rest of the volunteers, at the moment, they’re just for delivers but-

**Partner:** [unclear 47:37].

**Participant:** Yeah, that is true, they very… all of our volunteers are very outgoing, so they can turn anyone’s frown upside down. Urm… so obviously it’s quite good when you’ve got someone who’s been stuck in the house for eight months, we’re constantly getting e-mails saying, “thanks so much to the volunteer who came, they’ve sort of really made my day.”

**Interviewer:** Urm-

**Participant:** In terms of- sorry.

**Interviewer:** No, no, sorry.

**Participant:** No, I was going to say, sort of, in terms of skill sets, we’re sort of all-rounders if that makes sense, but to be fair, I kind of like it that way, because it means that… we can adapt and change at at a split second rather than having to learn each other’s job role.

**Interviewer:** Okay. In terms of motivations for getting involved, in your opinions, what are the motivations of other active participants?

**Participant:** Motivations? They just want to help. So, they, that is, that is, that is literally it they they don’t like the fact that they can sit back and watch the world go by whilst their neighbours suffer. Urr, and I think a couple of them as well its because the pubs are shut, so it gives them something to do. But no, it’s, I think genuinely the community spirit now, especially in South [TOWN NAME 1] is absolutely brilliant. And people have lost their jobs but they’re still willing to go out of the house and do something. And I think mental health as well, it’s helping a lot of people’s mental health, because they’re not cooped up inside all day looking at four walls. They can actually go out, make a massive impact on their community, but also make someone’s day.

**Interviewer:** And you mentioned community, sense of community, did you see a difference before COVID and now?

**Participant:** Yeah, before COVID the community was horrible. Urm, on Facebook, especially on Facebook, you-

**Partner:** [unclear 49:47].

**Participant:** Urr yeah sorry, yeah you can do yeah. Urr before COVID you’d constantly see on Facebook, yeah you have the odd people helping each other, but… I don’t know, everyone was quite bitter and sour. And I think, when the first lockdown came in, it was still like it for a week, but then people started realising that no matter, how can I word this lightly? No matter how stuck up you are COVID will catch up with you one way or another, and that’s… you’re going to need help one day, or your relatives are going to catch it one day or anything like that – we’re noticing that people are realising there’s no point putting each other down or ignoring each other or just being there for yourself. You need to be there for each other, because you never know when you may need the help back.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so and in terms of challenges and problems that you have encountered, for example, has involvement in the group, well you already said that it meant a lot of time and effort for you, urr, for the others too, do you think? For the other volunteers?

**Participant:** Urm… sorry, two seconds.

**Interviewer:** That’s okay.

**Participant:** Sorry could you repeat it for my partner as well.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, hi! Urr I was asking if urr has involvement in the group meant a lot of time and effort, for you, for others?

**Participant:** They… for us definitely. For others… not so much because we’re trying to make it… as quick and easy as possible for the end user, it also makes it quick and easy for the volunteers. So… when we, and like packing of the food parcels, we just tend to do it ourselves. And then… literally they just turn up, collect what they need to do and then take it, sort of go. Urr so to be honest I think, in terms of the amount of workload for the volunteers, they’ve got it easy. Urm… but for us it’s, it’s sort of full steam ahead at the moment, but we’re hoping to sort of change it and make it a lot less workload. In theory, in the end it should be a point at the only thing we need to do, is pack the parcel, that’s it. We should be able to make it so from start to finish, everything else is automated. So… the request comes in, we pack the parcel and then literally everything else like, that, the volunteer can come in anytime of day and collect it. So, because we’re moving, we’ve actually moving unit this month, to a bigger unit, and the plan is to have the storage section, because the storage part of the unit, urm, has its own external door, so the plan is each volunteer has their own code to get in the door, so then regardless of when we’re there or not, the volunteer can just turn up at any time, take it and basically, just get it done. So, the only involvement we will have in urm… sort of in the process is sort of just packing the parcel. And obviously that will mean we can get home two hours earlier on in the evening.

**Interviewer:** And have people drop out of your group?

**Participant:** Urm… I think we had one.

**Interviewer:** One, why?

**Participant:** I think they got he wrong end of the stick, I don’t think they really understood it, even though, when they fill in the form to sort of help… we do say, “do you have any questions or is there anything unclear or let us know what you need!” And there was nothing. So, then we sort of added them into the group and I think it was after like a day, they just suddenly left. And I contacted them, and they were like, “yeah, I don’t think it was what I was expecting,” I was like, “oh okay, fair enough.” But luckily out of everyone we’ve had one.

**Partner:** [unclear 54:11].

**Interviewer:** Sorry?

**Participant:** Ah no, she’s just saying they’re all brilliant.

**Interviewer:** Urm, so and any other problems that have affected the group, organisation. Communication, something like that?

**Participant:** Problems…?

**Interviewer:** Challenges?

**Participant:** Challenges, what challenges have we had?

**Partner:** Space.

**Participant:** Yeah, \*laughs\*. That’s the biggest issue yeah space.

**Interviewer:** Sorry? Space, okay.

**Participant:** Space, so, as I said we’ve moving unit for the fourth time now? Fourth time?

**Partner:** [unclear 54:57].

**Participant:** Well yeah, so one, two, three, fourth time we’re moving now to a bigger unit. Urm, so, the first place was my neighbour’s house, the second place was a unit we were borrowed in [AREA NAME 8], the third place is where we’re at now, and the fourth place will be a unit we’re currently moving into. Urr, yeah, that’s been a big challenge, because at the moment, our current unit, you can sort of, you can just about walk in there and turn around and walk back out. The, we’re running out of space big time. But urm… that’s kind of been… its been a constant struggle from day one and we move and it gets better and then we kept growing and –

**Interviewer:** And how did you access the, how did you get the unit?

**Participant:** So, the… the unit in [AREA NAME 8] we were literally just approached by someone on Facebook and they said, “look, we’ve got this unit, we’re looking to rent out, but because of COVID we can’t. So, you can use it, free pretty much.” So, we started using it and then, obviously they were still paying the bills and everything and sort of, once the first lockdown disappeared, they said, “look, we’re really sorry we are going to need the unit back,” I thought, “fair enough.” So, we … unfortunately couldn’t find another local space to urm… sort of move into if that makes sense, community centre or anything like that. So, we actually had to take the option of renting the unit, but luckily, the national Lottery funding came through. Urm… and then now we’re, it’s with the same landlord, we’re actually moving to a bigger building the other side of the urr sort of the centre, if that makes sense. Urm but yeah, unfortunately we’re having to apply for it ourself. As I said we want to become self-sufficient because you regularly hear the horror stories of charities and foodbanks getting kicked out of their local community centre because they need the space back. And I didn’t want to be in that situation. The more self-supporting we are, the less that could go wrong. Yeah, we could run out of money but let’s hope not.

**Interviewer:** Urr okay and how about the kind of things that you have done to help, or maybe help the group keep going?

**Participant:** Things we’ve done that have helped the group keep going? Late night and early mornings. That’s probably got to be the biggest one because I think if we never dedicated ourselves, we would have run out of time, money, we would have just collapsed and disappeared and… that would be the end of that. Urm and I think because we’ve managed, because we dedicated all of our time and effort and even money into it, it actually meant that we could continue supporting the needs of the community.

**Interviewer:** Okay, do you, do you have often meetings with the volunteers? Do you meet with the volunteers?

**Participant:** We… we don’t sort of tend to have meetings as such, because we don’t want to hinder with them. And because we’ve got such a, a flexible volunteering approach, what we tend to do is, if there’s something we need to tell volunteers that’s like urgent, we’ll put it on the WhatsApp chat and make sure every single person sees it. But if its just general sort of news, like ah yeah, we’re moving unit next month etc etc, urr we just tell them when we see them, because we see them all at least once a week. Urm… so yeah its, we try not to annoy people. Plus, it saves us time as well, if we were say, every week on the Saturday we’re going to have an hour long meeting to tell you about things, that’s another out of our Saturday, and an hour out of everyone else’s. Urm, its just not… not very nice. I I I know how they feel.

**Interviewer:** Okay, were any of the things that you do, and even the organising, the way of organising the group strategic, or just ad-hoc?

**Participant:** Urr…

**Partner:** [unclear 59:41].

**Participant:** Yeah… well as I say its sort of been pieced together as we’ve gone along, and we are getting more strategic now… urm, but on the other hand of that, as I say we… because we don’t have the time to properly test things before we implement them, we don’t know if they’re going to be strategic or actually disappear because they don’t work out. So, things that sort of we’ve done strategically is the automation of food parcel requests, sort of keeping people informed, like obviously all of that is going to stay, because we know it helps, it helps us, it cuts down our admin time it keeps the person informed. But them… for example the system of volunteers having their own code for the door… we might find a better way in the future, so I think everything we implement sort of starts of as ad-hoc, and then we… as we sort of… keep a close eye on it, we then decide do we carry it on or do we change it.

**Interviewer:** Okay, urm, finally for moving for the final questions now, I want to ask whether you have learnt something or anything from coordinating the group?

**Participant:** Urm… yeah, I’ve learnt that coffee is really good at keeping you up in the morning. Urr… I think… if there’s one thing we’ve sort of learnt from doing this is that-

**Partner:** There’s too many people in need.

**Participant:** Yeah, there’s too many people in need, its not necessarily because because of COVID, they’ve been struggling for years… but… there’s never been the support there, and you sort of kick yourself and you think, “oh, we should have set this up earlier,” but then you’ve sort of got to think, well at least we’ve set it up. Its better late than never, at least we’ve set it up. But we keep pushing the council and saying, “look, it’s alright helping people now but why didn’t you help them three years ago when they asked you for help? And why have you left them to struggle since and now you’re getting a local community group to help rather than the council?” So, we’re sort of trying, I don’t know its given us a little food for thought on how we can… change the council for the better. Well, I don’t think we’re ever going to change them.

**Interviewer:** No?

**Participant:** No, you’ll never change the council. But how we can sort of shape the way… people respond to people needing help. Because like what we’ve done up here, may not work in… [COUNTY NAME 2] or [COUNTRY NAME] or [CITY NAME 2] or wherever, obviously you can’t really have a one size fits all approach when it comes to helping people. Because every area’s different, every person is different, and every situation is different. But I think its given us a great insight into the local community… and how we sort of progress forward.

**Interviewer:** And why do you think it worked in your community?

**Participant:** I think because… because we’ve made it as easy as possible, because we’re not asking people to jump through hoops. Yeah, we’re flexible, we’re two local friendly faces who want to help, we’re not here to, as I say, we’re not here to hinder, urr… we… we basically said to people, “look, if you need help, you are getting help, we’re not going to start telling you to wait a week while we look at it and spend loads of money looking in to, it is what it is.”

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

**Participant:** Urm I’d, I’d say it’s going to be going on for a very long time, and I think… I can see us growing into more areas quite quickly, so opening say like a second base sort of down sort of [COUNTY NAME 1] way or [TOWN NAME 2] way or… whichever direction we decide to go in, I can see us opening like another centre and then having more volunteers based there and… basically create, and as we go through the years… create a bigger and bigger food delivery network.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and your role in the group in the future? How do you see it?

**Participant:** Urm, urm, I can still see myself doing everything. But I wouldn’t want to let it go, I don’t think I’d want to let go of… I’d still want to be… not necessarily doing everything, because obviously it would be good to let others like take charge of different things. But I think I’d still like to very much be, sort of, overlooking everything if that makes sense. Because obviously, as weird as it sounds… this is our baby now. So obviously we’ve started it from day one and we’ve put sort of our hearts and soul into it so-

**Partner:** [unclear 01:05:20]

**Participant:** Yeah, watching it grow from nothing, I wouldn’t just want to let it go and let it drift off with other people doing it. I’d still like to sort of keep an eye on it. Urm… I think its probably a bit of a … I don’t know, it’s sort of like when you let your kids go off to university isn’t it? Still, you don’t want to control them, but you want to make sure they’re not getting up to no good.

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

**Participant:** No, I’m urr, I think I’m happy with that.

**[Debriefing]**

**[End of Interview]**