

COVID-19 and Homelessness

Recruiting and Mobilising Volunteers

The COVID-19 outbreak has placed pressure on volunteer teams across the homelessness sector. Many existing volunteers are no longer available, whether due to age, underlying health conditions, caring responsibilities or self-isolation. There are also new activities requiring volunteers, for example providing food delivery and other support to people who have been moved from shelters and the streets into hotels. This briefing highlights some of the current schemes that can support charities to replace or extend their volunteer teams, as well as some of the key points about mobilising new volunteers during this period.

Recruitment

Homeless Link is happy to advertise any voluntary (or paid) positions that you have for free. These ads go out to over 30,000 people across the homelessness and supported housing sector. For further information contact: Mike.Wilson@homelesslink.org.uk.

Crisis has been in contact with their Crisis at Christmas volunteers and has volunteers ready to step into action. Currently some of these are on standby to support some central London hostels, however there are likely to be enough to bolster other London services when needed. Contact michael.phillips@crisis.org.uk

Housing Justice has access to a national network of volunteers through their work with night shelters, all of which are now closed. Mark Brennan m.brennan@housingjustice.org.uk is happy to circulate any requests for volunteers, many of whom will have extensive experience of supporting people who are homeless.

In London, the Mayor's office has links to COVID-19 volunteering opportunities across the city: www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/volunteering/coronavirus-volunteering-opportunities Civil Society organisations can submit remote volunteering roles: www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/volunteering/register-your-volunteering-opportunity

Business in the Community are matching up support businesses are offering to VCS agency requests. Many are UK-wide. Register request at <https://businessresponsecovid.org.uk>.

Volunteering Matters, in partnership with NCVO and others, has launched an initiative to connect voluntary organisations to the right people, skills and resources to support their response to COVID-19. They have issued a call to businesses who want to support charities through volunteering their skills, services and logistical support. To date, the offers from businesses include: business planning; project management; IT expertise; logistics e.g. vehicle supply; press and media support; and legal advice. To access this support, fill in the short form here: <https://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/charityconnect/>

Local volunteer centres and databases are still operating some core services. You can check out <https://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/>, www.civilsociety.co.uk/topic/volunteering.html and <https://do-it.org/> most of whom are already developing COVID-19 responses.

Watch out for new initiatives such as the COVID Mutual Aid project:

<https://covidmutualaid.org/get-involved>

Think about tapping into the student population. Enactus <https://enactus.org/country/united-kingdom> are happy to be contacted to circulate any requests for volunteers. Contact the CEO, Andrew Bacon at abacon@enactus.org or Hollie Stanton at hstanton@enactus.org. They have confirmed that they are open to sharing volunteer requests with their networks nationally, however they are unsure of reach with the current situation.

The Red Cross is currently recruiting and getting ready to mobilise support for where it's needed. To make an enquiry you can email: VCSEP@redcross.org.uk.

We Make Change www.wemakechange.org/communities/homelessness are happy to circulate requests for volunteers widely across their (mainly London) networks. You can email homelessness@wemakechange.org and the CEO james.sancto@wemakechange.org and they will assist.

Hands On London www.handsonlondon.org.uk is an organisation that links volunteers to charities including corporate groups. Their volunteers routinely work in shelters, soup kitchens and food banks as well as other types of charities. They are happy to receive all requests for volunteers, although they will want to ensure the opportunities sit within the latest safety guidelines. They also have a number of volunteers who can do online volunteering and tasks. To make contact, email Matt Sutton at matt@handsonlondon.org.uk

Using Social Media

Currently there are many groups becoming active on social media and seeking to engage with members of the local community to ensure that vulnerable people's needs are met as best as possible. While much of this is focused on supporting the elderly, there is frequent discussion of the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

A search on Facebook reveals solidarity and mutual aid groups in action. For example:

- Searching 'Covid-19 Haringey' comes back with the Haringey COVID-19 Mutual Aid group: www.facebook.com/Haringey-Covid-19-Mutual-Aid-100920541545836/
- The search 'Brighton COVID' links to the Brighton COVID-19 Mutual Aid group: www.facebook.com/groups/491658741529273/

There are also a number existing grassroots and faith-based groups on social media, which are engaged in street outreach and soup runs and are deeply concerned about the welfare of people being placed in temporary accommodation without access to food or support. They have noticed significant drop-off in street presence of people and are generally keen to re-deploy their goodwill to meet the needs of the changed circumstances. Search on Twitter and Facebook for groups active in your area to create new partnerships.

Mobilisation

Finding volunteers is only part of the issue. Preparing them to work safely and securely is a much bigger task. These are some of the things to consider:

- **Insurance:** You will need to have a conversation with your current provider – we have heard of insurers moving very quickly to help services adapt during this emergency. If you need some informal guidance on this you can contact Michael at Crisis michael.phillips@crisis.org.uk
- **Training and induction:** This is not something that can be completely overlooked, but you might change and condense your process. Think about whether training and induction can be offered online, or consider only accepting volunteers with relevant experience. This may not be the time to accept those with no previous experience of working in homelessness settings. New resources are coming

online during this period, as the call for volunteers is urgent, so keep an eye out for material relevant to your volunteer roles.

- **Risk assessments:** You will need to complete risk assessments that accurately reflect the working environment and the level of experience of each volunteer, to help match people to the right role. This process will help you check which roles require experienced volunteers and where paid staff must always lead.
- **Health and safety:** Based on your risk assessment, you will need to source the right PPE and ensure that there is training how to use PPE effectively in line with government guidelines: www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-use-for-non-aerosol-generating-procedures
- **Data protection:** GDPR still applies during this crisis, both when seeking information from volunteers and, once in role, if sharing information about the people being supported. Volunteers will need to be inducted in, and adhere to, the organisation's data protection procedures.
- **Suitability of applicants:** Many people wish to volunteer but may lack the essential skills to think on their feet and keep themselves, and the people they're supporting, safe. Services will need to include age and health restrictions, which go against our instinct not to discriminate. These decisions will need to be taken in line with government guidance regarding self-isolation and social distancing. Not everyone can be accepted as a volunteer – be prepared to say no.
- **Costs:** Volunteers will still need their travel expenses reimbursed as well as meals and any other reasonable expenses. It's worth creating a plan with your finance team as to how this can be administered effectively, especially if you normally rely on petty cash.
- **DBS:** The Government has published a factsheet/FAQ on community volunteer safeguarding and DBS checks: www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-factsheet-community-volunteers-during-covid-19-outbreak/safeguarding-and-dbs-factsheet-faqs

The Disclosure and Barring Service has put some temporary measures in place to set up a 24-hour check against the adults and children barred lists for a limited number of eligible roles in health and social care. For details, visit the DBS website:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service

Minimise risk by creating clearly defined volunteer roles, so that people can be tasked with activities that do not involve lone working, one-to-one support or handling finances. Some people may try to exploit the current situation in order to exploit vulnerable adults, so safeguarding and risk must be part of volunteer management, even while services are under pressure.

Crisis has agreed to assist with working this out if the DBS process is new to you, email Michael: michael.phillips@crisis.org.uk

- **Transport and location:** Where possible it is better to recruit volunteers who do not need to travel far to attend your service. This keeps the expenses costs down and reduces the risk of further infection.
- **Volunteering and benefits:** DWP rules on job searches have not been relaxed so it is important to remind potential volunteers that: the commitment can't impact on job search; they must give up volunteering work for paid work; and they need to update their work coach via their online journal.



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

Let's end homelessness together

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