

6 August 2020

Hello everyone,

Welcome the fortnightly briefing. We'd like to make this as useful and interactive as possible, so welcome feedback and suggestions about content.

If you know anyone else who'd be interested in receiving the briefing, feel free to forward, and encourage those to whom you forward to email nicola@devoncf.com to be put on the mailing list. Briefings will come out on a Thursday.

Click on the **BOLD COLOURED** links to be redirected to useful resources - Right click on the links if you want to open it in a separate window.



Communities VS Coronavirus

COMMUNITIES vs. CORONAVIRUS THE RISE OF MUTUAL AID, New Local Government Network. This report, published in mid-July, provides a thoughtful snapshot view of the mutual aid phenomenon'. Inevitably, given its institutional provenance, it has a focus on the relationship of local authorities with these groups, but its analysis is clear-eyed and robust. Here is a summary.

- Mutual aid is distinct both from traditional charity and public services. It's about 'ordinary' people becoming socially active in their neighbourhoods, linked by 'reciprocal dependencies'.
- It has been an essential and very effective tool in coping with this crisis. But how can we ensure it is not only available in a crisis?
- New mutual aid groups tended to be concentrated in urban and wealthier areas with furloughed working-age people. In more rural or deprived areas, groups often emerged from existing institutions such as foodbanks, churches, or community organisations. We must pay attention to the potential for increasing inequality of this kind of action is predicated on conditions found only in wealthier areas – but more research is needed on this, as much neighbourly activity, not labelled as 'mutual aid' would likely pass under the radar.
- Many mutual aid groups began with a limited number of essentially practical actions – shopping and collecting medicine – and later moved onto focus on more complex problems, such as loneliness or financial instability/other forms of vulnerability.
- Challenges have often related to how to structure the group, and how to best manage behaviour, motivation and morale
- The ways in which local authorities interacted with mutual aid groups was crucial, and varied a lot. Where this relationship was most successful was where the LA took a respectful and facilitative role, rather than a completely hands-off one, or an overly controlling one.
- Mutual aid groups' activities indirectly provide a 'map of insufficiency' – as they have tended to fill gaps in council provision.

Recommendations:

1. **Councils should play a facilitating role as Mutual Aid groups evolve.** Councils will need to operate in the grey area between doing nothing and doing everything with creativity, trust, and above all a clear understanding of the value these groups add within their communities.
2. **The creation of a community support financial package for local government.** Government should invest in Mutual Aid by investing in local government, and this package should include provision to support community development teams and to train wider staff in community-centred approaches.
3. **Employment policy and practice that supports flexible working, giving working-aged people more time to volunteer.** The potential of more free time for community power and mutualism should form a core part of considerations as future policy responses for economic recovery and renewal are developed.

I do wonder whether the 'mutuality' of mutual aid (that is, the dissolving of the divide between helper and helped in favour of an ethos of collective responsibility and support) is as universally espoused by participants as is assumed here. But maybe that's a question for the future research this report advocates. In any case, it's a thought-provoking contribution.



Spotlight on ... Unemployment

Over the last few months, we have all had to accept that coronavirus has had and will continue to have an impact on almost all areas of our lives. Loss of employment – whether through furloughing or permanent redundancy – has the potential to be particularly damaging.

There are many factors associated with the loss of a job that can have a huge impact on our lives. Our jobs offer us financial stability, a routine and much of our social networks. All factors that we have come to greatly appreciate as a result of this pandemic.

- Over the past three months those claiming out of work benefits has more than doubled and the number of employees furloughed from their job roles is currently at 9.5 million. With the furlough scheme set to end in October and the UK economy on rocky ground, the full impact of Covid-19 on employment is still yet to be seen.
- This is a stressful time no matter what point you are at in your career, however the current employability situation is perhaps especially anxiety inducing for those leaving education and making their first steps into the job market. A [report](#) from the Resolution Foundation predicts approximately 800,000 18-24 year olds are due to enter the job market this year. These young people are likely to face increased competition for fewer job vacancies as well as long-term reduced earning potential.
- There is a large amount of research into the relationship between meaningful employment and positive mental health, so understandably [mental health charities](#) are anticipating an increasing need for support of those who have found themselves out of work.
- For those further from the workplace, finding employment often begins with support to build confidence, learn new skills and find volunteering opportunities, all of which have also been affected by the lockdown.

In Devon

[Citizens Advice Devon](#) told us In the first 3 months of 2020/21 the Citizens Advice service in Devon dealt with nearly 2,500 enquiries relating to employment issues - a 54% increase on the same period the previous year. Initially, they had a lot of enquiries about the furlough scheme and the financial support available to self-employed people but they are now starting to see a significant increase in enquiries from people facing redundancy. Devon's local Citizens Advice offices can advise people on their employment rights and how to raise issues with their employer both informally and formally if it appears that there has been a breach of employment law. They can also advise on the benefits and other financial support available to people who face a loss of earnings. A lot of useful information is available on the [national Citizens Advice website](#).

Exeter Community Initiatives – [Parent Progression Team](#) assists parents living in Devon, who have children under the age of 8, into volunteering, training or employment with the help of one to one support. At any one time they can be working with up to 45 parents. When the country went into lockdown in March, they had to adapt their service accordingly to cope with the change in demand. With various other services in lockdown and organisations not recruiting staff or volunteers they offered support, albeit remotely, to parents for their most pressing issue which, for many, was home schooling or needing encouragement in unfamiliar territory. One of the biggest barriers during this time is that many parents do not have sufficient access to online courses due to not having a computer or laptop at home which highlights the effect of digital isolation for those who do not have the means to purchase such equipment. As lockdown has started to lift and as a nation we are establishing a tentative 'normal' the team continue to receive new referrals and offer support to parents, identifying strengths and areas that can be improved on and to ultimately help parents to hit their progression goals.

[Empowering Enterprise Project](#) is funded by the European Social Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund. For the past 3 years it has helped over 650 18-24-year olds in Devon who face the biggest barriers to getting into work, education or training. The pandemic has presented a number of challenges for the young people, the staff team and the partner organisations who support them:

They told us ...

- “Digital skills - it is not a foregone conclusion that all youngsters have access to technology and the skills to use it. From refugees in Plymouth creating and sharing videos on how to set up Zoom and email, to participants in Torbay practising video interview skills we have covered a lot of ground.”
- “Mental health - we have seen ups and downs with participants’ mental health, but we have done a range of work including one group of young mothers battling isolation in lockdown but connecting through food and recipes with their Corona Kitchen Cookbook. Some young people really appreciated the time during lockdown to focus on their personal goals and have come out the other side with renewed energy and ready for work.”

Unfortunately, the funding for Empowering Enterprise comes to an end this summer however, partners working on the project will continue to support Devon’s young people.

Access to Work benefits are still available to those who have a disability or a physical or mental health condition that makes it hard to do their job. The [Ready Devon Employment Hub](#) has plenty of information about accessing the available support during the virus outbreak.

[Positive People Devon](#) offers a lifeline to people who are not in work to help build confidence, skills and give a sense of hope for the future. The projects give people the opportunity to get involved in local communities, meet new people and have fun through a range of activities. The team have been continuing to support clients remotely throughout the pandemic and they are open for further referrals. They have also been keeping in touch and sharing resources on their [Facebook](#) page.

Clients are able to access support from a change coach who can support with employment, wellbeing, skills development, and addressing any barriers that may be preventing them from gaining employment. For those who are not yet ready to move into the workplace the community coaches can support clients with engaging in their local community, signposting to relevant services and attending various workshops and events. If you would like to access support or find out more you can contact the team [here](#).

Throughout the pandemic it has become glaringly obvious that our dependence on technology to work remotely is a major barrier to many across Devon. Along with programme partners Cosmic, the Positive People team are able to offer devices to participants most in need of support. They are [appealing](#) to local businesses and individuals who have unwanted laptops to donate them to the team who will refurbish them and pass them on.

Cosmic works alongside Positive People to provide digital support, employability skills and self-employment guidance. Throughout the lockdown they have been helping people to make the most of their technology whilst working from home, as well as providing engagement activities such as a weekly quiz via their [Facebook](#) page. The latest newsletter, which you can sign up to [here](#), provides details of the latest workshops and offers including a Digital Employability Workshop and a Virtual Job Club.

Job Clubs

There are a large number of regular job clubs operating across the county and many have moved their support online or are looking forward to opening their doors as lockdown eases. These clubs offer access to computer equipment as well as support and guidance on all sorts of employment matters including job searching, CV writing and making sure clients have the appropriate paperwork for job applications. The Devon Pinpoint [website](#) lists many of the available Job Clubs and their contact details.



Coronavirus | 
Click for our help & support

Click to donate to the
Devon Coronavirus Response & Recovery Fund | 

Click to donate to the national appeal
#shouldertoshoulder #GiveLoveDevon | 

DCF Funding Update

Crafty Fox Cafe N Hub - £1000

Kings Ash, Paignton

Coordination of volunteers to support vulnerable residents to re-engage in community after period of isolation

Exim Dance Company CIC - £2000

Plymouth

Providing activity packs and remote contact to disadvantaged young people whilst face to face workshops are unable to take place

Exmouth Friends in Need - £500

Exmouth

Providing essential food, hygiene and cleaning items and meter top-ups for referred local residents to help alleviate financial poverty

Plymouth Highbury Trust - £2148

Plymouth

Purchasing tablets and data to enable vulnerable women to access support and stay in contact with families

The Pioneers Project CIC - £4406

Plymouth

Provision and distribution of food parcels on a deprived estate in Plymouth; facilitation of remote small-group session to support mental health of vulnerable young people

Trevi House Ltd - £7520

Plymouth

Extra staffing & associated overheads and PPE to cope with increased need due to lockdown

Co-Lab Exeter -£1660

Exeter

Providing online accredited workshops for vulnerable adults

Exeter Community Initiatives - £4440

All over Devon

Purchase of lap tops and data to loan to parents enabling access to skills and training

Living Options Devon - £2981

Exeter & North Devon

Adapting services to provide support and disseminate guidance and information to people with disabilities, including those with limited visual or hearing ability

Westcountry Savings and Loans - £5000

All of Devon

Providing debt advice and financial services to those in financial difficulty due to COVID-19

Ellacombe Community Partnership -£1170

Torquay

Providing hot meals and food parcels to vulnerable customers whilst community cafe is closed

Plymouth Communities Befriending Consortium - £2720

Plymouth

To continue providing communications and stimulus to a growing client base suffering increasingly with isolation and depression as lockdown eases

Okehampton & District Community Transport Group - £1000

West Devon

Providing PPE and fuel costs enabling Community Transport services to continue and operate whilst following government guidance

Friends & Families Of Special Children - £6800

Plymouth

Purchase of laptops and phones for staff to enable more remote support of children and families with high level health needs

DYS Space Ltd - £9589

Devon

Staffing and activity costs to enable continued remote support for SEND and LGBT+ young people