

How to ... Run a COVID-19 Volunteer Community Support Group



**A practical guide to support
you with setting up and
running a COVID-19
volunteer community
support group**

Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services

Life-enhancing, enterprising voluntary action at the heart of vibrant
communities in Pembrokeshire



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How to ... Run a Covid-19 Volunteer Community Support Group

Introduction

If you have brought together a group of volunteers to help your community in response to COVID-19, then this guide is for you. Firstly, thank you for the important role you and your volunteers are carrying out during this time in Pembrokeshire. You are playing a massively important part within your community in response to this pandemic.

This guide has been developed to assist informal volunteer groups carrying out **personal arrangement** volunteering during COVID. The number 1 priority is to ensure you and your volunteers remain safe and well including the people you are supporting in the community.

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Section 1.

General Guidance on Running your Group

Volunteers or helpers in the community are usually organised and supported by Volunteer Coordinators in order to run more smoothly. There can be more than one person carrying out this role to share the responsibility. This also ensures that if someone becomes unwell, the support can continue. These roles can be carried out by anyone in the community with a willingness to support and help local people.

Here are some ideas to get your community support group up and running:

- Besides the Volunteer Coordinator roles, other roles could include marketing and promotion, social media, administration, developing simple procedures, organising requests for help, matching requests to volunteers, social media, etc. These roles are in addition to the general helping volunteer role carrying out tasks such as shopping, picking up prescriptions, dog walking and running general errands etc.
- It is of utmost importance to always put safety first for both volunteers and the people being helped when deciding what task your group is prepared to carry out. For more information on keeping people safe and risk assessments, click [here](#)
- Make a list of the roles or tasks your group is willing to carry out in the community. Shopping, picking up prescriptions, dog walking, telephone calls and general errands that **DO NOT** involve entering people's homes are all acceptable. If you receive a request to carry out a task that requires entering someone's home, is complex in nature or requires professional support, then call the [PCC Community Hub](#) or [PAVS](#) to refer the request to other support. You **CAN** say **NO** to a request but let them know you will signpost them to the appropriate support.
- It is beneficial for volunteers to have some form of identification such as a lanyard or ID card so they can be easily identified. To view the Guidance for using Volunteer Identification, click [here](#).
- If your group volunteers encounters something challenging or raises safeguarding concerns, contact the [PCC Community Hub](#) or [PAVS](#) for support and advice.
- Finally, always make sure you follow the COVID-19 advice from official sources to avoid spreading the virus such [Public Health Wales](#) and [UK Government](#).

Section 2.

Reaching Out to People in your Community

Once your group is established, the next step is to let people in your community know you are there to support them, particularly the people who are elderly and in the [highest risk categories](#). The priority is to keep everyone safe at all times, both the volunteer helping and the people being helped. Consider ways of reaching out to your community.

Some ideas to consider:

- Break your neighbourhood down into smaller areas and identify people who are willing to take on the role of contacting the people living closest to them.
- Delivering fliers or postcards to everyone through their letter boxes ensures the message gets out to the whole community
- Display posters on community noticeboards, local food stores, pharmacies or local areas where there is footfall.

- The information on the publicity materials can be either your group's main contact details or if preferred, the PCC Community Hub's contact details. Click [here](#) for an example of a door-to-door neighbourhood leaflet.
- Set up a simple website or a Facebook page with contact details and information about the support being offered and suggest that local people share the information.
- Set up a WhatsApp or email group to share information.
- Give precise details of the help that is available from your group so people know what help to expect or to ask for.
- Encourage people who need help to make contact in a variety of ways, being aware that not everyone is online.
- Approach local businesses and services doing local deliveries e.g. pharmacies, supermarkets, takeaway deliveries etc, if they can promote the support your group is providing via their delivery service.
- Do **NOT** knock on doors unannounced

Important: Volunteers need to wash their hands regularly and/or use hand sanitiser often when handling anything that will be shared with other people while volunteering. This includes fliers, postcards, parcels and prescriptions. Avoid handling cash as much as possible. Take care when pressing door bells and opening door handles and remember, **DO NOT** enter anyone's home. Face coverings can be used as an extra barrier. Follow [Public Health Wales guidance](#) on washing hands and always follow [social distancing rules](#).

Section 3.

Supporting Volunteers

Community volunteers are kind enough to give up their time, so they will want to feel useful, valued and involved. Making them feel included will ensure you retain them within your group. Here are some ideas to keep your volunteers engaged:

- Simply invite local people to come on board. Sometimes that is all it takes for people to come forward to help out.
- To further expand your volunteer team, use various methods to reach out to as many people as possible. These include door to door fliers, social media, word of mouth, posters at local venues etc.
- [PAVS](#) can also help with referring more volunteers to your group so contact them for help.
- Double-up by using the same media to let people know you are there to help while also asking for helpers.
- There are many skilled people in the community so utilise their skills as some may not be currently working due to the crisis. Ask what they can contribute as it may be something you won't have thought of.
- Be clear about what you want volunteers to do so they can make an informed decision about getting involved.
- Match volunteers with requests they like doing if possible such as shopping, dog walking (see Guidance for Volunteer Dog Walking during COVID [here](#)) or picking up prescriptions. Telephone or online buddying volunteering is ideal for volunteers who are in the [higher risk categories](#) as they can safely volunteer from their own homes.
- Help volunteers keep in touch with each other using social media like a closed Facebook volunteer's page or WhatsApp group.

- Ensure volunteers have the opportunity to check-in regularly to make sure they are doing ok. Ask if they are happy with the tasks and the time spent volunteering and if they have encountered any challenges.
- A buddying system could be a way of volunteers supporting each other so they can check if they are feeling well, or know when they start and finish. Avoid physical paired volunteering if this breaches the [social distancing guidelines](#).
- A simple thank you goes a long way so ensure your volunteers feel valued. Ask if they would like to be put forward to tell their volunteering story to promote positive community spirit at a difficult time.
- **DO NOT** ask a volunteer to do anything that puts them at risk or they do not want to do it. If a volunteer is asked to do something that they are not sure about, make sure they have the opportunity to discuss this with you.

Section 4.

How to Operate your Group

Develop an up-to-date list of volunteer's contact details and store them securely, sharing it only with other group volunteers who need access. Only ask for necessary information that is needed. Make sure you get support for the things that you cannot help with, by contacting [PCC Community Hub](#) or [PAVS](#) who will be able direct you to where you can get further information and advice.

As volunteers come forward, the next steps will be:

- To ask for their contact details and check their identity (if they are not known to the group).
- To inform them of how their information is held and used.
- To provide a name and contact number for your group and explain that someone will be in touch to introduce themselves and explain how your groups works.
- To direct them to read any group rules and volunteer agreements if relevant. Click [here](#) for an example of a volunteer agreement.
- To tell them how they will get something that identifies them and the group, such as a name / ID badge, or/and a t-shirt when they come to the house.
- To assign a volunteer buddy if relevant (for example, a street champion and or buddy) and let them know that they will be in touch.

As people come forward asking for help, the next steps will be:

- To confirm with the person needing support which volunteer will visit and when and how they will identify themselves.
- To contact a volunteer and ask them if they will help with the request, giving all the relevant details. Ask the volunteer to contact the person being helped to discuss the support in detail.
- If at any point, they are uncomfortable or unsure of anything, ask the volunteer to call their volunteer buddy or group coordinator for guidance and support.

Section 5.

Keeping People Safe

Keeping volunteers safe including the people being helped is the **number one priority** during COVID. As the crisis develops and changes, it is important to constantly review what does and doesn't work. Some things to think about include:

- Ensuring volunteers **DO NOT** for any reason go into the people's homes they are helping, regardless of the task or support they are providing.
- Ensuring that vulnerable people are advised **NOT** to open their door to anyone they do not know.
- Avoiding handling money if at all possible. Money cannot only be lost or stolen, it can also contaminate those handling it. If this is the last resort, and no other way can be established, ensure it is recorded, and hands are washed or hand sanitiser used immediately after. (see [Managing Money](#) for more details)
- Having a procedure to raise safeguarding concerns relating to children, young people and adults at risk. This could be a concern raised from within the group or the wider community. Contact the [PCC Community Hub](#) or [PAVS](#) for advice and support.
- Issuing regular up to date [Public Health Wales guidance](#) on safety measures such as washing hands, social distancing and social isolation.
- Keeping up-to-date lists of volunteers and the people receiving support ensuring data is safe and secure.
- Keeping a record of which volunteer is doing what and when. Buddy schemes can help people check on each other and reduce the pressure on group coordinators.
- Having a [Risk Plan](#). Share your risk plan with the group and on social media and review weekly.
- Encouraging volunteers to gauge their own risk using the Traffic Light Volunteer Safeguarding document ([email](#) to request a copy)
- Volunteer dog walking can carry an additional set of risks so see the Guidance for Volunteer Dog Walking during COVID [here](#).

Section 6.

Guidance for Using Volunteer Identification

There are a number of reasons to consider implementing a Volunteer ID procedure including:

- **Carrying out necessary journeys**

During the COVID-19 lockdown, the police and other authorities now have the powers to randomly stop people who are out and about in the community to ask if their journeys are necessary. Having a form of recognisable ID will help if this happens to a volunteer carrying out legitimate tasks for others.

- **Multiple purchases**

Volunteers doing shopping for people who are unwell, self-isolating or in the classified high risk categories, may need to make multiple purchases. Most supermarkets and food stores have put restrictions in place during COVID to limit the number of items purchased at one time. This potential issue can be overcome if a volunteer shows some form of ID.

- **Helping people in the community**

Volunteers may not be known to the person they are helping in the community, so having a volunteer ID will give confidence to the person being helped. It is good practice to have other ways of verifying that a volunteer is genuine e.g. coordinators giving a password to the volunteer and the person being helped which is changed daily, introducing a new volunteer before they assist a person being helped for the first time etc.

- **Public Perception**

People in the community are encouraged to report others who do not follow government guidelines of social distancing and carrying out essential journeys during COVID. Volunteers

who are genuinely carrying out community support, benefit from having a form of ID or a way of being easily identified as someone out and about supporting the community. This may reduce assumptions being made by overzealous citizens that volunteers are breaching government guidelines.

Volunteer Identification Approaches

There are a number of ways in which volunteers can be identified.

- Clothing including printed T-shirts, hi viz jackets or tabards
- ID cards, badges or documents
- Lanyards, armbands or sashes
- Signage for Cars/trolleys
- Additional ID Documents

For more information, click [here](#) for the Guidance for using Volunteer Identification.

Section 7.

Managing Money

Managing money is one of the biggest risks. Decide what the main risks are and what you will do to reduce those risks, and include them in your Risk Plan. Money cannot only be lost or stolen, it can also contaminate those handling it. Try to **AVOID** handling any money if at all possible, as many local shops will allow the payment of goods over the phone by arrangement. You can reduce your risk by:

- Not sharing any bank or credit card security details and have very strict procedures in place if they are to be used for any transactions.
- Having a limit on the amount that can be spent a single shopping trip e.g. £45.
- Making a record of all money transactions and keep receipts.
- Avoiding personal contact between volunteers and people being helped. If there is contact for whatever reason, make sure hands are washed before and after any contact. Do not risk cross contamination taking place.
- Asking if volunteers have an up-to-date DBS check. You could ask if they are willing to take on the responsibility of handling money on the occasions where it cannot be avoided. Keep this to an absolute minimum if at all possible.
- Confirming when a person supported received their goods, and take a photo of their receipt and record any change given.

Section 8.

Managing Information

- Only collect necessary information about volunteers and the people being helped to run your group's activities
- Ensure that the people giving you their personal information have agreed for you to collect it and let them know how it will be processed and shared.
- Keep personal and sensitive information safe and secure and only allow access to the people who need it to run the group.
- Do **NOT** share personal, sensitive or confidential information online or anywhere in the public domain.

Section 9.

Local Support in Pembrokeshire

Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services

Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) is an independent voluntary organisation and the County Voluntary Council for Pembrokeshire. PAVS is the umbrella body which supports the 3rd Sector across the county. For more information click [here](#) or email enquiries@pavs.org.uk.

PAVS Volunteering Pembrokeshire

PAVS Volunteering Pembrokeshire offers up-to-date information, advice and guidance to people who are looking for volunteering opportunities. The team within PAVS Volunteering Pembrokeshire can match potential volunteers' skills and interests with a suitable volunteering opportunity.

For more information click [here](#) or email volunteering@pavs.org.uk.

Pembrokeshire Community Support Network

The Pembrokeshire Community Support Network (PCSN) is facilitated by Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) and is a network of community support groups that have set up in response to COVID-19. The PCSN offers the opportunity to share good practice and provide support and guidance for volunteers helping in the community during COVID. To register with the network, click [here](#) or for more information, email pcsn@pavs.org.uk.

Benefits of joining the PCSN include:

- Good practice support documentation
- Weekly PCSN online meetings
- Access to the PCSN private Facebook group
- Details published on the [PCC Community Hub](#) online database and [map](#)
- Free volunteer lanyards
- Eligibility to apply for the [SCAF Micro fund](#) of up to £500
- Free online training sessions

PAVS Community Connectors

PAVS Community Connectors can support people by connecting them to local services, information, projects and activities with community groups and charities within the 3rd Sector and the Public Sector including the Health Board and Local Authority. Through having meaningful conversations, they can provide vital support to people within the community.

For more information, email communityconnectors@pavs.org.uk

Connect2Pembrokeshire

Connect2Pembrokeshire is one of three platforms set up across West Wales. Accessed via www.connect2pembrokeshire.org.uk the sites provide a space for community members to both offer and request assistance to other individuals. This is managed through a digital time bank that distributes time credits for each hour undertaken. The platforms also contain a Project Team feature that allows small groups of people to meet privately, share documents and assign tasks as they plan community interventions on any scale. The platforms also host campaigns with the first 'Connect to Kindness' planned for launch in late May/early June 2020. If you have any questions or need more information, email lee.hind@pavs.org.uk

Pembrokeshire Community Hub

A one-stop shop Community Hub has been established during COVID-19 for those of you who are:

- [seeking help with tasks such as shopping \(as a result of self-isolation\)](#)
- [able to provide help to those in need and wanting to volunteer](#)
- [involved in community support groups, co-ordinating volunteer efforts in their communities, and looking for help, advice or guidance](#)

A number of [County based and National organisations](#) are offering help in a variety of ways including:

- Benefits
- Bereavement
- Carers
- Community Connectors
- Domestic Abuse
- Government Support
- Mental Health
- Safeguarding
- Scams
- Support

Use the drop-down search box facility to locate the category you are looking for.

For more information click [here](#) or call 01437 776301

Section 10.

Other Support

Disclosure and Barring Service. For more information click [here](#)

UK Gov Guidance on Safeguarding and DBS Factsheet. For more information click [here](#)

Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA). For more information click [here](#)

Welsh Government – Look Out for Each Other Campaign. For more information click [here](#)

NCVO – I Want to Volunteer during COVID-19. For more information click [here](#)

National Trading Standards – Beware of Scams. For more information click [here](#)

Public Health Wales – Latest on COVID-19. For more information click [here](#)

GOV.UK – Latest on COVID-19. For more information click [here](#)

ICO – Community Groups and COVID-19. For more information click [here](#)