

CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUND (COMF)

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Final Report

OCTOBER 2021 – MARCH 2022



Devon Voluntary Action

A Devon-wide partnership building vibrant, healthy communities





This report was produced by Devon Communities Together, who has been managing and delivering the project. Devon Voluntary Action is responsible for the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) which is funded by Devon County Council.

Visit www.devoncommunities.org.uk for further information.

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October 2021 to March 2022 - Key Findings

- The project has reached out to Community Groups/ Mutual Aid Groups (MAGs) and Community Shops in Devon, excluding Torbay and Plymouth. In order to understand the changing nature of volunteering, during the Covid pandemic. This research was carried out by conducting surveys, face-to-face conversations, telephone conversations and Zoom focus group meetings.
- A total of 57 community groups/mutual aid groups and community shops participated in this project and shared their experience by completing the online survey. The project engaged with a total of 25 volunteers who shared insight into the changing nature of volunteering, from this insight 11 case studies were produced.
- A common thread among community groups/ mutual aid groups was that the community came together during the pandemic and supported each other. The research has showed that there was a lot of kindness, to others, during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The top three categories community groups/ mutual aid groups would like in place to support them are; fundraising support, staff/ volunteer skills training and mental health/ wellbeing support.
- Some groups indicated that people did step up and volunteered including new people who had not been involved before as well as long-standing community members.
- Community shops provided an important service to their communities during the Covid pandemic and often acted as a centre for other extra help provided by other groups in the community.

“Everyone is the cog that makes the mechanism work... Everyone has got a role to play. I think that there is a role for everybody, and it does not have to be the obvious one. But you need every single one of them.”

Shop Manager at Ide Community Shop
- Despite most of the shops losing a large proportion of their volunteers (usually due to the age demographic), particularly in the early days of the pandemic. Most shops adapted quickly to maintain a service to their communities.
- Paid managers generally worked more hours as the amount of goods needed to satisfy demand greatly increased. Ordering proved time consuming, however, many used both existing and new local suppliers, helping these businesses survive.
- Turn-over increased (often by a considerable amount) and while most shops feel they have maintained a 10% uplift, they recognize that they need to work to maintain the loyalty of these new customers.

Introducing: Community Connections

Community Connections was a further piece of place-based research (building upon research work previously undertaken) to include: scoping any relevant research regarding the changing nature of volunteering by face-to-face, telephone and group Zoom meetings with at least 30 rural based volunteers or volunteer-based groups across Devon. During the Covid pandemic it became clear that community groups/ mutual aid groups (MAGs) and community shops had and continue to play a vital role in providing services for their communities.

Community Groups/ Mutual Aid Groups (MAGs)

Across Devon many community groups/ mutual aid groups (MAGs) have been supporting their local community throughout the pandemic. The research has showed that there was a lot of kindness, to others, during the Covid-19 pandemic. In many communities, neighbours have organised themselves into mutual aid groups to support each other. Each community group and mutual aid group is different, as some groups cover a wide area with a central phonenumber which you can call to offer or ask for help, others are a WhatsApp or Facebook group for people who live in the same village or town. They all have one shared purpose for the local people to help those in their community. These groups have during the pandemic offered a range of services including delivering food parcels or meals on wheels, setting up food banks, befriending and ringing lonely community members, collecting prescriptions, sharing news, collecting and donating products as well as shopping for family, friends and neighbours.

Community Shops

Devon has a high number of community shops (approx. 36) and they are often in locations where there are few public transport options and larger shops are some distance away. Food shops were the only ones that could remain open in the early days of Covid and many people did not feel safe in visiting larger stores. Community shops quickly built a loyal following from their communities, often from people who had not used them often before the outbreak.

The small size of most community shops meant that they quickly needed to modify their trading, as social distancing rules were not possible inside most of the shops. This ensured that customers were safe while shopping. Some closed their doors completely and offered an order and delivery service, while others allowed collection from outside the premises.

Survey sampling of the shops provided interesting information about how these businesses coped during the various phases of the pandemic. 29 responses showed that there were a range of methods used to ensure safety of not only customers but staff too, but also, how these businesses, that rely heavily on volunteers, managed when many of them were forced to isolate.



Information was obtained from surveys, phone calls, visits and focus groups, it was clear that most shops appreciated an opportunity to discuss their story and there is no doubt they did feel isolated from others experiencing the same problems.

Input and Activities

The funding for this project comes from Devon County Council, Devon Voluntary Action is responsible for the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) Targeted Community Covid Responses (TCCR) Programme. Devon Communities Together has undertaken this further piece of place-based research, building upon research work previously undertaken during 2021. In order to understand the changing nature of volunteering face-to-face conversations, telephone conversations and Zoom focus group meetings and surveys has been conducted with at least 30 rural based volunteers or volunteer-based groups across Devon.

Outputs (Targets)

The output for the project was to;

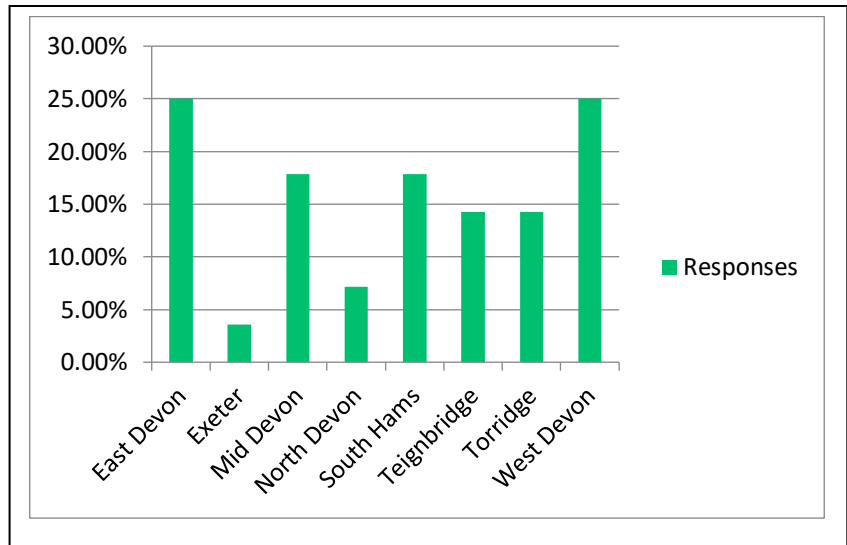
- Connect with small community-based groups and the research to be completed and distributed to VCSE and public agencies

The following engagements with community-based groups and volunteers have taken place;

Outputs	Target	Engaged
To research volunteering among rural based volunteers or volunteer-based groups across Devon	30	57
Total community groups engaged via survey		57
Community Groups/Mutual Aid Groups		28
Community Shops		29
Total volunteers engaged over Zoom or 121		25
Total community groups engaged via Zoom focus group		7
Focus Group - Community Groups/Mutual Aid Groups		5
Male		2
Female		3
Focus Group - Community Shops		2
Male		1
Female		1
Total community groups engaged 121		18
Community Groups/Mutual Aid Groups		6
Male		1
Female		5
Community Shops		12
Male		3
Female		9

The above table shows details of the **57 community groups who participated on the project** – meaning that they completed the online survey, out of them **7 individuals participated in an online focus group** and shared their Covid story. The project reached a total of **25 volunteers who shared further insight** into the changing nature of volunteering, from the insight **11 case studies have been produced** which are attached in Annex A of this report.

Research showed that there are more than 35 mutual aid groups in Devon, nearly all of them have a Facebook page, however there are many more community groups across the county. The 28 community groups/mutual aid groups who completed the survey came from the following districts of Devon;



In total there are approximately 36 community shops in Devon, out of them 29 community shops participated in this project and provided valuable insights into how they experienced the Covid 19 pandemic.



Reflections from surveys

COMMUNITY GROUPS/MUTUAL AID GROUPS

28 community groups/mutual aid groups completed the survey, out of them 67% are still active. They all provided a range of services including meals on wheels, food banks and shopping for community members. Additional services which they provided were befriending, marshalling at the vaccination centre, some emergency home care, maintaining contact with members via Zoom, information sharing, milk deliveries, dog walking, posting letters, providing cash, organising community events such as scarecrow parades, quizzes, remote events, as well as collecting and donating fruit and vegetables to charities and community groups, and transporting people to all medical appointments including doctors, vaccinations, hospitals, etc.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Meals on Wheels	10.71%	3
Food parcels	10.71%	3
Food banks	7.14%	2
Prescription collection	50.00%	14
Emergency household repairs (i.e white goods)	3.57%	1
Topping up gas and/or electricity cards	10.71%	3
Ringling lonely members of the community	46.43%	13
Topping up pay as you go cards	3.57%	1
Collect and donating clothing	7.14%	2
Ferrying people to vaccination centre	21.43%	6
Shopping for community members	53.57%	15
Other (please specify)	71.43%	20
Total Respondents: 28		

Services provided by the Community Groups/ Mutual Aid Groups

The challenges that were experienced included volunteers with little or no experience, little or no funding, difficulty in reaching out to the community such as making sure people know what was available and reaching vulnerable people, sheer volume of requests during first lockdown, fewer people willing to come onto the committees and to help run these groups, lack of IT skills within groups and community members, the changing Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and the sudden decrease in volunteers as many were over 70, vulnerable or had vulnerable family members. However, some groups experienced very few challenges as everyone in the community were willing and able to help others.

43% of the respondents received funding during the pandemic, this funding came from the following funders; District Council, County Council, Central Government, National Lottery and Devon Community Foundation. There was also funding from various sources including; Parish council, membership, bequests from wills, Tesco, Co-Op, LiveWest and private donations.

The top three categories community groups/ mutual aid groups would like in place to support them are; fundraising support, staff/ volunteer skills training and mental health/ wellbeing support. When the groups are reflecting on the future they have indicated they will;

- start up again when they feel safe
- have regular meetings/ updates, clarifying charity positions and funding will be further discussed
- keep going and support the local and international community
- have monthly meetings and planning social events for 2022 to encourage community spirit, encourage residents to regain the confidence and mobility they have lost and to fund raise
- provide digital monthly newsletters in order to communicate with the community
- recruit more volunteers and look further into fundraising
- become a C.I.O

Further reflections are;

“Its been a difficult 2 years, but had some amazing asset-based community projects and support. Affordable and good quality training sessions, for example for first aid and food hygiene, and access to cheaper DBS checks would be helpful.”

TRIP CTA, Community & Project Manager

“A new committee has just been elected. We are working towards restoring our normal activities although we are in transition at the moment. We are looking to increase our visibility in the town and to recruit new members. A perennial problem is finding volunteers to join the governing committee so we are hoping to encourage members, especially younger and new members, to consider coming forward for the committee in twelve months time. We are also encouraging the creation of new interest groups and activities.”

Tavy District U3A, Chairman of the Board of Trustees

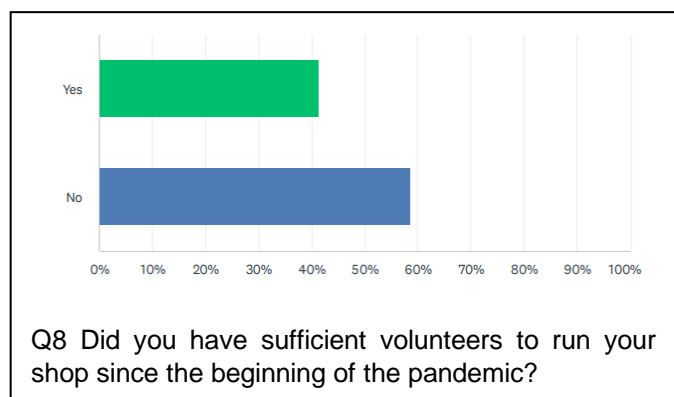
COMMUNITY SHOPS

The majority of respondents were paid members of staff, usually the Manager, although few of these worked full time. Several shops are run entirely by volunteers and with enthusiastic and committed residents they managed to provide a continued service throughout the pandemic for example Payhembury Provisions, Chittlehamholt and Hawkchurch are all volunteer run.

The most common number of staff was one, but several shops had a second person, usually working less hours than the manager. No shops stopped trading during this time, although trading hours were often reduced due to lack of volunteers, particularly during the first lock down. While a few shops continued to operate services in the same way as pre-pandemic, most were forced to reduce their open hours due to lack of and safety concerns for their volunteers. However, the shorter opening hours did not affect turn-over with most shops reporting a considerable increase. Although this has gone back to a more normal level now, most felt it was about 10% higher than pre-covid levels.

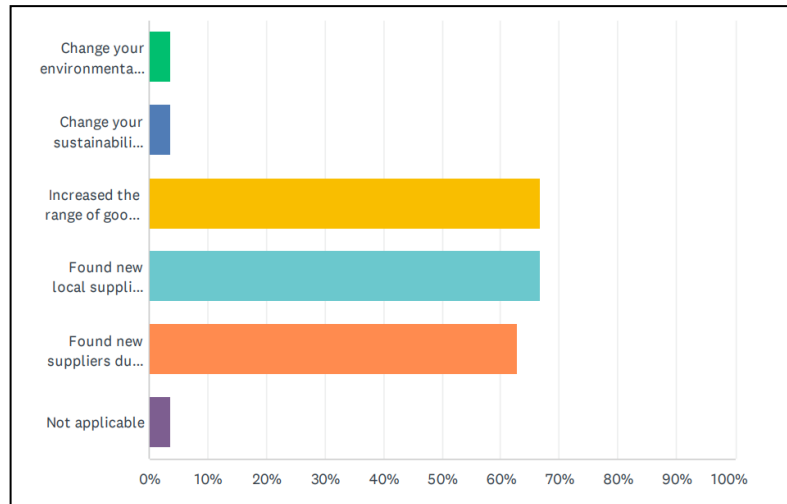
Where there were paid staff, they were often paid for a longer working week (the cost of this covered by increased trade or by grants). A few were not offered extra payments, but it is clear that they worked many extra hours to help their communities. At the start of the pandemic, most shops found that many of their volunteers had to isolate, often due to their age. It is very clear that most shops have an elderly volunteer pool, but this age group have the time to volunteer and gain most from the social aspect of helping. The number of volunteers volunteering in individual shops varies considerably, but the number gained is generally less than the number isolating.

Many community shops did not have sufficient volunteers to run the shop throughout the pandemic. Due to a shortage of volunteers shops had to reduce their opening hours this seems to have had little effect on trade and some have continued to operate in this way with little effect on turn over. Furloughed workers and others that had more time available did step into fill some of the gaps,



and businesses benefitted from their new ideas, this included to set up a new emailed billing system and to set up ordering now digital and stock checking too. Some of these volunteers have stayed, but in many cases they have now returned to their usual employment. While paid staff often worked longer hours, many appreciated the support they received from their Management Committees, however, during discussions some felt a lack of appreciation and support.

Most well-established community shops, feel they have few additional training needs, but it is clear that many would appreciate a chance to talk to others with similar experiences. Grant funding was much appreciated, and was used to fund extra staff time, pandemic equipment and replacing equipment with more environmentally sustainable



alternatives. Most businesses had to adapt their trading methods during the pandemic. Increased trade allowed for a greater range of goods to be sold, and increased turnover, helped with maintaining the quality of perishable items, something that can be a problem, particularly bread, fruit and vegetables. Customers appreciated, being able to ask for specific items that were then obtained. However, there were shortages, including flour (overcome by buying large bags and weighing into smaller ones), pasta (often obtained through catering suppliers), tinned tomatoes (at least one shop visited all the local supermarkets to obtain stock).

Adapting ordering allowed these items to be sources. Local suppliers of bread, fruit and vegetables, eggs, ensured stock was maintained and helped to maintain other businesses during the pandemic. Few shops felt their environmental or sustainability policies were compromised over the pandemic, but few managed to improve their policies. One shop with cloth reusable bags that they lent, had to stop this, due to the increased risk of contamination. There were continued supply chain issues with the large wholesalers, who are making more difficult for small outlets to buy goods, both with the level of minimum orders and added delivery costs. Some community shops have found alternatives, and are generally pleased with the service they receive, although sometimes, not all lines are available from one supplier.

Reflections from focus groups

The focus groups focused on sharing the Covid story from the volunteers with the wider group. New ideas and learnings took place as well as establishing new relationship between the participants.

COMMUNITY GROUPS/MUTUAL AID GROUPS

From the pandemic there were many lessons learnt and one of the greatest learnings for many groups were that they were able to reach people of the community which they before had little connection with. There were different ways to reach the community this could be done via WhatsApp groups, Facebook groups, joining up with other charities or groups to help sign post the members of the community, delivering leaflets or sending digital newsletters as well as using the word of mouth.

“There is a lot of people out there, it is just trying to reach them and help them and a lot of people now who perhaps did not speak to their neighbour, is recommending us to them as well because they found out what services we offer... From Covid, we have managed to reach a lot of people who we did not know lived in Dawlish and a lot of people who are on their own and who did not know that we existed.”

Volunteer coordinator at Assist Teignbridge

One of the volunteers mentioned that the older population were really scared to come out to the community again after the pandemic, hence free coffee outings to encourage them to come out and join in was organised. There are a lot of people on their own out there, however it is very difficult for them to take the first step.

Although this proved to be a barrier for some people the community stepped up and support each other during the Covid pandemic. From checking in with neighbours, collecting prescriptions, go food shopping for family, friends, or neighbours.

“The whole community came together”

*Membury Support Group,
Volunteer and Administrator*

COMMUNITY SHOPS

The two community shops which participated in the Community Shops focus group, although many community shops had provided extra information during telephone calls, were Burrington Community Shop based in Burrington, Umberleigh and Sandford Community Stores Sandford, Crediton. The two shops shared their story as well as gave important insights to each other on how to reinvent themselves and to gain more volunteers and buy in from the community as well as finding out of different funding opportunities. It was also clear that a dynamic Management Committee helps the business to thrive, and continuation planning is essential. The telephone calls and the focus group were a good chance for some to ask questions, that were not strictly relevant to the survey.

Reflections from 121 conversations

From the 11 case studies which has been produced as part of this project it is worth mentioning some insights which was shared by the groups and the volunteers.

COMMUNITY GROUPS/MUTUAL AID GROUPS¹

Volunteers who have been happy to have a further conversation shared their Covid story as well as the positive impact and the challenges which arose during the pandemic. The greatest insight is that the community came together and supported each other. The kindness of the members of the community is tremendous, people stepped up and helped each other. Many wonderful stories were shared about how the community worked together and overcame the challenges which the pandemic brought such as the isolation.

COMMUNITY SHOPS²

Community shops have been very happy to share their experience. It became clear from the first calls made that community shops welcomed the opportunity to share their Covid story, experiences and were pleased to find that their experiences were often shared by others. The majority of shops continued to offer a range of services, however, it was clear that they formed a vital life line for their communities and a base for many extra services. Other services which they took up during the pandemic were;

- Set up a First Aid group e.g Ashwater Parish Council and the Community Shop
- Set up group to help community, linked to shop
- To help vulnerable and highlight their need
- Produced a list of vulnerable residents, including emergency planning.
- Provided masks free to customers, often homemade with comic figures, for those without. e.g. Exbourne Community Shop, this helped with those who did not want to wear one
- Some set up a separate Covid task force e.g Hawkchurch Parish Council set up 'Chart' this worked with the shop to provide deliveries, orders prescription collection and delivery
- Helped with Covid information, including signposting services.

"I was falling apart through social isolation until this place opened, and now I have a reason to wake up in the morning. "

One of the community members of Sylvania Community Store

¹ 6 case studies have been produced which are attached in Annex A

² 5 case studies have been produced which are attached in Annex A

Website and Social Media Communications

Website

The below project page was created as part of this project.

COMMUNITY MUTUAL AID GROUPS & COMMUNITY BUSINESSES CONNECTION

25TH OCTOBER 2021 - 31ST MARCH 2022

Community Mutual Aid Groups & Community Businesses have always played a vital role in supporting the most vulnerable members of our communities.

During the pandemic especially, they've shown amazing energy and resilience to provide vital help to so many vulnerable people in Devon.

DO YOU RUN A COMMUNITY BUSINESS? MAYBE YOU'RE A PART OF A LOCAL VOLUNTEERING GROUP?

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We are engaging with these groups to understand their concerns, ideas, needs and experiences. We will be feeding our findings back to local government, suppliers, key funders and decision makers to ensure that the voices of community groups and businesses are heard as we rebuild from the pandemic.

Please contact victoria.grimberg@devoncommunities.org.uk to make sure your experiences are represented in this important research that will help to shape future support for the sector.

JOIN OUR FOCUS GROUPS!

Last year Devon Communities Together did some research to understand the impact Covid had on Community Groups/Mutual Aid Groups. The responses were very valuable and now we are inviting Community Groups/Mutual Aid Groups to an online focus group to see how things have changed, since the beginning of the outbreak.

[FOCUS GROUP FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS/MUTUAL AID GROUPS](#)

[COMMUNITY SHOPS FOCUS GROUP](#)

TAKE OUR SURVEYS!

[IF YOU'RE INVOLVED IN A COMMUNITY MUTUAL AID /VOLUNTARY GROUP, PLEASE TAKE OUR SHORT SURVEY HERE](#)

[IF YOU WORK IN/RUN A COMMUNITY SHOP, PLEASE TAKE OUR SHORT SURVEY HERE](#)

Funder: Devon Voluntary Action is responsible for the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) from Devon County Council.



TAKE OUR COMMUNITY SHOPS SURVEY HERE



CONTACT VICTORIA TO FIND OUT MORE

victoria.grimberg@devoncommunities.org.uk



BACK

[To the projects page](#)

e-communications

Devon Communities Together issued an e-bulletin to an average of 2,546 recipients. The e-bulletin from March 2022 can be seen below.



Social media

Throughout the project the project have reached out to the community via our social media channels; Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Devon Communities Together created and issued a total of 18 pieces of content across Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn related to the project. We have also linked up with over 30 mutual aid Facebook groups. The content reached over 1,517 people across the three platforms.



Dissemination and Recommendation

The report will be distributed to organisations inside and outside the project.

As this report has shown, the work of this project, which was built on the previous phase, continued to research on the Covid story from engaging with **57 community groups** and **25 volunteers** the research has shown that the work that these community groups have been doing had and will continue to have an immense impact to the communities across Devon.

Dissemination

The insight and findings will be shared to the funders and all community groups and volunteers who have participated in this project, the report will also be shared on Devon Communities Together social media channels including as a news article on the web site. Furthermore, it will be distributed via our LOVE Devon magazine and our digital newsletter to the members of Devon Communities Together including to the trustees of the charity as well as to other voluntary, community or social enterprise organisation (VCSE) and public agencies in Devon and England via our networks.

Recommendation

The below points are the recommendations based on the findings of this research project;

- To set up a peer-to-peer network for community groups and community shops, although how best to achieve this is unclear, as many different suggestions were made
- To set up networking groups where the community groups and community shops could share best practice, as well as to share ideas, issues and to be able to sign post if necessary
- To be offered help at the early stage to help those involved, as most have little experience of community enterprises
- To be offered support around recruiting and retaining volunteers including training of managers, management committees and volunteers
- To encourage businesses and organisations to offer an opportunity for their employees to take up volunteering, for example 1 day per year
- To develop a list of organisations who supports the community which other organisations could sign post to

This research project was the next phase from the previous Covid Support project, the final reports for the previous phases could be found here: [COVID19 Community Local Outbreak & Recovery Helpline | Devon Communities Together](#)

APPENDIX A

CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUND

(COMF) – CASE STUDY

SPREYTON VILLAGE SHOP

Spreyton Village Shop took part in the COMF Community Connections project managed and delivered by Devon Communities Together funded by Devon County Council.

BACKGROUND

Spreyton is a village on the edge of the Dartmoor National Park. The shop has been open for just over 10 years and is situated in a purpose built building next to the Village Hall and the playing field. The shop stocks a range of items that use local suppliers wherever possible and has a part-time Post Office. Outside there are benches for takeaway drinks and snacks enjoying views over the National Park.



The Covid-19 story of Spreyton Village Shop

The shop remained open throughout the pandemic, offering an ordering service and either collection or delivery of goods, (all those undertaking deliveries were provided with proof of 'essential journeys'). Goods could be left on the veranda of the shop for collection for those minimizing contact with others. Newspapers were put in a cupboard on the veranda for collection and billed weekly, allowing more space within the shop. However, this did reduce impulse buying.

As with most shops the number of available volunteers greatly reduced (normally around 40) but the Manager worked extra hours and an ex Duke of Edinburgh trainee was recruited to work 10 hours per week. He was good at IT and helped with this aspect of the business. Opening hours were reduced but customers were kept regularly updated about changes. The volunteers that remained worked as teams to minimize contacts.

Stock was replenished and cleaning carried out in the evening when the shop was shut. One customer at a time allowed inside the shop, windows and doors were kept open for ventilation, signage on the floor and hand sanitized from an automatic dispenser before entering. BACS payments were set-up and card only payments (exact cash was accepted if really necessary but no cash kept on the premises so change could not be given). Covid rules were regularly updated as they changed, with a prompt sheet in the day book. Locally made fabric face masks raised £200 for the Devon Air Ambulance. Turnover increased but increased costs meant margins remained fairly constant. Some 'events' were cancelled including a wine tasting session for safety reasons and Christmas Hampers had to be altered but more local produce was included to support other businesses. The return of some volunteers by summer 2020 was celebrated with a Covid safe celebration but volunteers were regularly thanked with small gifts such as Easter Eggs. The 10th birthday was a scaled down event, but still enjoyed by the volunteers.



A gift of a 'Winter Fuel Allowance' allowed the shop to set up contributions to local Food Banks and these can still be made through the shop. The shop will order items requested by the Food Bank to help with shortages. While Covid has generally had a positive effect on trade, turn-over is now returning to 'normal'.

"I could not have asked for a better boss, he was nothing but supportive. He took all of the pressure, all of the agro from people wanting to know this, that and the other. And just said; 'Everybody come through me, leave the girls to get on and manage the shop'. He checked in with me every day just a quick phone call or a text saying 'Anything I can do? Are you okay?' When we made decisions that was sometimes a bit controversial or when we had the occasional issue with people making demands to come into the shop which we had closed the door of, he backed us a hundred percent."

Shop Manager at Spreyton Village Shop on support from the Management Committee

CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUND (COMF) – CASE STUDY

SANDFORD COMMUNITY STORES

Sandford Community Stores took part in the COMF Community Connections project managed and delivered by Devon Communities Together funded by Devon County Council.

BACKGROUND

Sandford is a rural village on the outskirts of Crediton in Mid Devon. The community shop is well established and has been open for a number of years, providing a vital local service.

The Covid-19 story of Sandford Community Stores

At the start of Covid almost all of the 40 volunteers had to isolate meaning the business had to quickly alter how things were run. Two young people immediately stepped in to help and quickly learnt how to operate the shop systems. Sadly, they have both now moved on with their lives. The shop was rearranged to allow customers to be served through the front windows, which are now used to display stock. The Post Office remained open but by keeping just these customers in the shop the small space was kept Covid safe.



Window display replaced after use as a counter.

Turn over rapidly increased and what was once a weekly order became a daily one. The fruit and veg man often coming twice a day. Keeping the customers outside allowed the floor to be used for storage as the shop has very limited space for extra stock. An ordering system was established, and deliveries were made by volunteers on Friday after a Thursday order. Ready meals were obtained from local supermarkets, this provided valuable to those less able members of the community. A complete list of items stocked was made available, so ordering was more straightforward for the customers.

The local butcher, fishmonger and prescriptions were all delivered to the shop for inclusion in local deliveries and for collection. Extra stock lines were added, some of which have remained, this allowed for interesting Christmas Hampers to be made and local gift items were sourced and added. While trips to larger towns were difficult the shop provided an outlet for an Exeter gift shop which helped this business which was forced to close during the pandemic.



CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUND

(COMF) – CASE STUDY

IDE COMMUNITY SHOP

Ide Community Shop took part in the COMF Community Connections project managed and delivered by Devon Communities Together funded by Devon County Council.

BACKGROUND

Ide Community Shop has been in existence for 14 years, starting in a portacabin and then moving to a converted garage. The shop has a full-time Post Office (old model that pays for a Post Office manager).



The Covid-19 story of Ide Community Shop

During Covid they maintained their usual open hours, although many volunteers isolated. At times this meant customers had to queue outside the shop as numbers were limited in the relatively small building. Some were served at a table outside to keep customers safe. Screens are still in place although other Covid measures have gone.

‘Ide Angels’ checked on the vulnerable and helped with shopping and deliveries. A ‘WhatsApp’ group was set up to appeal for help when deliveries were needed. Takings rose considerably during the pandemic, and this has been maintained since that time, the staff feel there is a greater loyalty from the community that is a result of their efforts during the pandemic. Teignbridge District Council provided a grant which was used for Covid measures, and the remaining amount will be used to replace aging equipment. This is a really well stocked shop that makes every effort to sell what the residents of Ide want to buy and stock local produce wherever possible.

The Shop Manager at Ide Community Shop discussed different roles which volunteers take on in the shop, including one member of the community who washes the textile bags which customers can borrow to take their shopping home. The different shop roles made sure that the community shop could continuously stay open during the pandemic, these roles including the chairman who chaired the society ensuring legalities were followed, the cleaner who cleaned the shop, the person who stocked up and the person who manned the till. All these roles are vital to the business.

“Everyone is the cog that makes the mechanism work... Everyone has got a role to play. I think that there is a role for everybody, and it does not have to be the obvious one. But you need every single one of them.”

Shop Manager at Ide Community Shop



CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUND

(COMF) – CASE STUDY

EAST BUDLEIGH COMMUNITY SHOP

East Budleigh Community Shop took part in the COMF Community Connections project managed and delivered by Devon Communities Together funded by Devon County Council.

BACKGROUND

East Budleigh Community Shop is a well-established Community Shop in East Devon, that has traded successfully from its early days in a 'shipping container' to the purpose-built building that they now occupy in the village Car Park. The shop has is well stocked with an interesting range of products. There is a coffee machine and a range of snacks and a simple seating area.



The Covid-19 story of East Budleigh Community Shop

When Covid struck in March 2020, the Management Committee and the three paid staff decided that for the safety of their volunteers, they would shut the doors and offer only an order and delivery service for the village. The paid staff worked on a rota with two in the shop each day completing the orders and arranging delivery (some of this was undertaken by volunteers). The usual 40 volunteers were asked to remain at home and the shop was shut at the weekends.

This situation remained the same until early June 2020, when the doors were opened. Unfortunately, the opening date was delayed when the till system broke down. With Covid safe measures in place the shop reopened, but with reduced open hours, originally 10 fewer a week and more recently 5 fewer a week. Although the majority of customers have now returned there are still a few who feel reluctant to visit the shop and their orders are still being delivered. With no volunteers, the paid staff received more salary, which increased sales helped to fund.

The Chair of the Management Committee helped the staff enormously by allowing them to focus on running the shop while he dealt with all the other issues, with the help of his team. He checked daily on the situation so problems could be quickly resolved. The decision to shut the shop meant that volunteers had a 'holiday' but they have, mostly, now returned although some retraining was needed.



The Covid pandemic has proved how valuable our community owned shops are to their residents, and this has been reflected in a large uplift in turn over. Although this has reduced somewhat, loyalty has remained. East Budleigh is currently in the process of buying their pub The Sir Walter Raleigh to become another community owned asset. Subject to the approval of the members the shop may donate a considerable sum to its purchase.

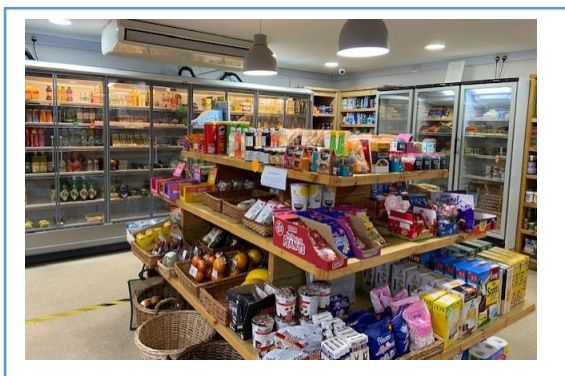
As with most well-established shops, the training needs are small, if any. However, East Budleigh, along with most shops feel that a chance to meet with other shops occasionally could be of benefit.

The grant from East Devon District Council at the beginning of the pandemic was appreciated, it allowed the business to cover the extra staff costs and the extra equipment that was need to provide a safe working environment for the volunteers and the customers. During the pandemic some foods were difficult to obtain (flour, pasta, tinned tomatoes etc.) and the staff regularly trawled the local supermarkets for goods that were available through the usual wholesalers. The

“My priority was keeping the staff safe and keeping the shop open for the community”

Shop Manager East Budleigh Community Shop

pandemic has made it clear that allowing Booker, the wholesaler the majority of community shops use, to become part of the Tesco group has created many problems for small businesses and many are now seeking alternatives, this could have a positive effect on smaller independent wholesalers.



CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUND

(COMF) – CASE STUDY

SILVANIA COMMUNITY STORE

Sylvania Community Store took part in the COMF Community Connections project managed and delivered by Devon Communities Together funded by Devon County Council.

BACKGROUND

The shop opened in July 2021 taking over an empty Lonsis store, the project took route during the Covid pandemic on an estate of 1,400 house on the Northern outskirts of Exeter. The community is rather isolated from the rest of the city, with an unreliable bus service and is a 45 minute 'hilly' walk to the city centre.



The Covid-19 story of Sylvania Community Store

The model is rather different to most community shops that are rurally situated and serving a spread and varied catchment, here the community is relatively close. The Management Committee should be praised for their wonderful effort in getting the shop open, especially as grant funding is hard to obtain, and during Covid most that was available went to support existing shops.

Sylvania Stores has a range of food items, with an emphasis, where possible, on local food, stationery, cards and household items, including a small selection of refillable products.

There is a large book exchange, and a soft playroom for the children. Coffee is served from a quality machine using locally sourced coffee and a range of simple snacks are available including cakes and local pasties. A refitted kitchen area will allow this selection to expand in the future.



Opening during Covid created problems but with the careful monitoring of the Covid rules, the business was able to keep the community safe while starting to build the business. This shop has one original feature, having a larger space than most shops which allows them to offer the community a chance to partake in various activities including art, International Friendship group, Book Club, crochet etc. This helps to bring the community together and over time should create a social hub for the area. As with all community enterprises the need for volunteers is not easy to address but the welcoming atmosphere should ensure that over the long term the community will form a good and reliable set of helpers.

“The International friendship group is very interesting here as we have with 20 plus languages on this estate... We had a party, bring your shared own food from your country with live music.”

Pete

An open day is planned to allow the community to meet the artists whose work is currently displayed, hopefully this will be used to recruit more volunteers and to encourage the community to value their new service.



“I was falling apart through social isolation until this place opened, and now I have a reason to wake up in the morning. “

One of the community members of Sylvania Community Store

CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUND (COMF) – CASE STUDY

WASHFIELD SUPPORT NETWORK

Washfield Support Network took part in the COMF Community Connections project managed and delivered by Devon Communities Together funded by Devon County Council.

BACKGROUND

There are about 300-400 people who lives in the village. The village has mainly an elderly population, as it has been a farming community with 20 farms in the village but now, they are down to five. One younger couple has recently moved to the village, however it is very difficult for young people and young couples to buy a house in the village as they can't afford it.

The Covid-19 story of Washfield Support Network

Washfield Support Network was established last March when three people from the village got together to form the support group, they got lots of other villagers on board and they also did set up a WhatsApp group. They asked people if they were interested in volunteering and had lots of people who came forward, including new people who had not been involved before as well as long-standing community members. The support network matched people to each other based on where they lived so they could stay connected with their neighbours. The WhatsApp group has about 25 people in it however it reaches beyond 25 people as people inform their families, partners and the wider community.

The villagers have all stayed together, they had a huge village day last September “Our Washfield, Your village”. More than 100 people came to the village day celebration and many community groups took part as well. Since this day people has taken up more volunteering for example driving the community bus and bell ringing. During the pandemic one person who had some great IT skills was helping one neighbour sorting out their broadband after not having it for 2 months, which was invaluable.

“We knew our village was wonderful, but we found out that it was even better than we thought... I have become friends with people in our village that I did not even know before and I am still friends with them. I think that all the terrible things that has happened in the pandemic there has been some amazingly positive things that has come out of it and this family I now call my friends.”

Volunteer coordinator

It is more back to normal now as the craft group, the mobile library and the community bus is running again. During the pandemic the farmers made meat boxes, such as pork and beef which has made people of the village think really hard on where they buy products and services and to buy them from local businesses.

There was a lot of isolation during the pandemic and some responsibility had to be passed on to neighbours such as shopping for an elderly community member. Some active older residents felt confined, when they would normally be very self-sufficient, which made them feel limited. Some of the older people have children who has moved away from the village and the local community was filling their void. The community stepped up and supported people. The technology helped the elderly population as they could also connect with their local community or with family further way, where people were lending iPads to other community members and showed them how to use the iPads for them to be more connected. Some older people embraced technology and whilst others started to write letters in order to communicate with people.

The future looks very good for the community and for the Washfield Support Network, people has been helping each other during the storm Eunice in February 2022 by for example contact each other to check in and help each other to cut down any fallen trees. There are smaller groups meeting more often such as a lunch club, which has been invaluable.

The positivity of neighbours and friends balanced out the negativity which they read about in the news. The pandemic, overall, provided more positive outcomes for the community where the greatest one is that it has brought the community closer together. It really showed how wonderful people are and what they were prepared to do for the community during this difficult time.

CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUND

(COMF) – CASE STUDY

TEDBURN ST MARY OUTREACH

Tedburn St Mary Outreach took part in the COMF Community Connections project managed and delivered by Devon Communities Together funded by Devon County Council.

The Covid-19 story of Tedburn St Mary Outreach

Tedburn St Mary Outreach who are a community transport scheme takes people to any medical appointments and has been in existence for over 25 years. They roughly have around 25 drivers who could transport people to their appointments however during the pandemic they lost about 10-15 drivers due to the fact that they were over 70 or 80 years old or they were younger and had a vulnerability or had a partner who had a vulnerability. However, at the same time medical appointments were completed over the telephone so they stopped operating during some months as they were advised that their drivers would be exposed to Covid-19. In October 2020 they started again, and they attracted around 5 drivers. They had grants for purchase of PPE which meant they could buy in bulk hand sanitisers, face masks and disinfectants. A new protocol was put in place for when they took passengers and while the expenses increased the grant subsidised that purchase.

“It has generated more community spirit through the pandemic, people had not been involved suddenly seen to get involved collecting prescription and so on.... Lots more community spirit happened as a result of Covid, that has been noticeable.”

Coordinator, Tedburn St Mary Outreach

The community connected with each other more than before, however the challenge was the level of fear. People of the community were anxious and isolated, and with the news reporting on Covid rates this made the community more fearful. Looking at the future, the services are still much needed and some services which they provided in the past have been stopped whilst new services have been introduced as time has changed. In the past more families lived locally and looking at the area now some of the adult children have moved to other cities or countries and local volunteers have become more vital to help support the older generation by taking them to medical appointments, as this was a service which the adult children would have done in the past.

CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUND (COMF) – CASE STUDY

PLANET & PEOPLE CIC

Planet & People CIC took part in the COMF Community Connections project managed and delivered by Devon Communities Together funded by Devon County Council.

The Covid-19 story of Planet & People CIC

Planet & People Community Interest Company (CIC) created resources for families and workshops for schools and learning groups centred on inspiring young people to LOVE the Earth. The activities focused on Learning, Observing, inVolving and Enjoying, led by the National Curriculum, and encouraged children to be passionate about the natural world as well as understanding and protecting the life that it supports. Their ethos is: inclusive learning, community-centred, environmentally responsible, balancing education with entertainment and positive and inspiring.

They set up the CIC during the pandemic and offered, and are still offering, workshops and activities to the whole of Devon, they faced uncertainty as it was difficult to navigate due to the Covid restrictions. Schools were also cautious to start up any activity and did not want classes to mix, which was challenging. However, as they got more time on their hands and as they were in the beginning of setting up the CIC, they adapted easily and converted their ideas into activity boxes which is now a workshops series for schools. They have also worked with other community groups, field study centres and families who has children of school age. They had volunteers who has supported them and they hope more volunteers would join them in the future. The volunteers who have volunteered their time so far has been in-between jobs or looking for other opportunities, this experience has then provided them with new skills or given them CV points.

“We are very committed to Devon, we are a community interest company because we really care about our offering and we really want to help people to be more environmentally friendly.”

Director, Planet & People CIC

CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUND (COMF) – CASE STUDY

ASSIST TEIGNBRIDGE

Assist Teignbridge took part in the COMF Community Connections project managed and delivered by Devon Communities Together funded by Devon County Council.

The Covid-19 story of Assist Teignbridge

Assist Teignbridge supported the community throughout the pandemic, the volunteer coordinator put out a call for volunteers and took on 268 extra Covid volunteers. The first lockdown Assist Teignbridge was the point of call and the coordinator would allocated the volunteers to clients. Many volunteers were furloughed, and during lockdown 2 and 3 the 268 extra volunteers stayed as volunteers even though they were not furloughed anymore. Many did some hours when they were able to during evenings and weekends, for example delivering fish and chips on a Friday evening.

There is still a need for smaller jobs such as changing a tap, put a key safe up and wash the wheely bins out and a young man has gone self employed and the volunteer coordinator refer any small job requests to him on a regular basis. Everyday there are people in the community who ring up and ask for help, these people live from Dawlish to Cofton and Holcombe. They have also sign posted to other organisations in the area, however, there are organisations and groups which are operating but coordinators might not know that they are operating or what they do. What would be helpful is to have a map which covers Devon and map out each organisation who are supporting the community for coordinators, for them to be able to refer clients to other organisations and to form a wider network and partnerships.

“If we had a list of organisations, who they were, who to contact and what they did in a little booklet that would be great.”

*Volunteer coordinator,
Assist Teignbridge*

During the Covid pandemic, one positive outcome was that they had groups that started up for example a knitting and crocheting group. They have knitted items that have been displayed in the town which is something that has cheered Dawlish up during Easter, Carnival Week, Christmas and Remembrance Day and that will continue.

CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUND

(COMF) – CASE STUDY

TAVY DISTRICT U3A

Tavy District U3A took part in the COMF Community Connections project managed and delivered by Devon Communities Together funded by Devon County Council.

BACKGROUND

Tavy District U3A promotes life-long learning and social interaction among older people who no longer work full-time. They have monthly general meetings with a speaker and refreshments and approximately 50 small special interest groups of all sorts run by members acting as volunteer group leaders. Currently they have approximately 340 members mostly aged 65 and older, some much older. 70% of their members are women, 30% men. Many are widowed and live alone. They are a self-help, mutual-aid group registered with the Charity Commission.

The Covid-19 story of Tavy District U3A

Tavy District U3A has supported the community before and during the Covid pandemic. Before the lockdown they had around 400 members and since the pandemic started, they have lost members. One of the challenges they have is to recruit people to the charity. Demographically the population is of a more senior age, the community were both frightened of the technology as well as embraced it. By embracing the technology and using social media and WhatsApp this has meant that people have been able to keep in contact as they could not see each other due to the Covid restrictions.

They have multiple smaller groups including a walking group and art group which people from the community attend on a regular basis. It was vital to have some social connection and these groups provided the much-needed connection between the community members. They looked after each other by for example being a voice on the end of the phone. For example, one elderly man who had been married for many years become a widow and for him Tavy District U3A helped him to carry on with his life by being there for him.

CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUND

(COMF) – CASE STUDY

WOODTOWN COMMUNITY WHATSAPP GROUP

Woodtown Community WhatsApp group took part in the COMF Community Connections project managed and delivered by Devon Communities Together funded by Devon County Council.

The Covid-19 story of Woodtown Community WhatsApp group

“People know each other to say hello in passing, but we headed into the pandemic, and it was quite clear that people did not know much about each other and falling on from a lady who had her 85 birthday. We put a leaflet through some people’s doors to say we will have cake in the street and sing happy birthday. From that ‘lets have another means of communication’ and most people who had a smart phone signed up to the WhatsApp group .”

Coordinator, Woodtown Community WhatsApp group

Woodtown is a small hamlet, with a predominately elderly community, which has about 20 houses. Woodtown Community WhatsApp group is a group which people could communicate with each other for example to ask for help. It was clear that lots of people supported each other, and the community came together during the pandemic. People have stayed on the WhatsApp group, and they keep helping each other. It could be as simple as wishing a community member happy birthday or for example, during the storm this year they have kept helping each other, as they did not have power in the area for over 50 hours, so people offered camping gas stove or for people to come into their home to warm up in front of the wood burner. This shows that the positivity that was created is still there, and the community is watching out for each other more now than before the pandemic. When new people move into the area, they have been notified that this group exist and if they joined there were messages welcoming them to the town. The challenge was to keep in contact with the members of the community who did not have a smart phone. However, they also produced a newsletter to keep the community informed and keep them connected as well as had a V Day in the street to mingle outside to connect further and sit and talk. People are now more aware of the community and the members of the community.