

**Devon Communities Together
COVID19 Community Local
Outbreak & Recovery Helpline**
Supporting Village Halls, Community
Buildings, Parish and Town Councils.

Monthly Report
May 2021



Covid-19 Community Local
Outbreak & Recovery Helpline
From Devon Communities
Together

Supporting Village Halls, Community
Buildings, Parish and Town Councils
into the recovery phase

Call 0808 1963390



Helping Communities Help
Themselves for 60 Years

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1.0 Phase 5 – Summary of Covid 19 activities May 2021

In May 2021, the trend which began in April 21 of queries relating to opening up, rather than closing down, has continued. There were more calls to the Helpline (66) than in April (52) but almost all of these related to guidance on re-opening community buildings and village halls – social distancing guidance, Covid 19 signage and cleaning regimes. Guidance on funding sources to assist with re-opening and financial viability continues to be requested. . Helpline queries and information/advice given are detailed in Section 2.

Since March 2020 Devon Communities Together has responded to over 1600 calls to the Covid 19 Helpline.

Requests for help with completing Restart Grant applications has continued, as well as requests from community groups in West Devon and East Devon for help and advice regarding applications to National Lottery, Community Renewal Fund and the Return to Play fund.

We supplied 2 case studies of Covid 19 community mutual aid support, for the Devon Public Health Annual Report and, provided guidance on terms of reference to the emerging Devon Food Partnership as its VCSE representative. Our ABCD approach to local community development as well as our presence on strategic partnerships has helped us to share intelligence and learning from community groups, organisations, local businesses and Town & Parish Councils across Devon

Our engagement with Devon's strategic partnerships working to support the Covid 19 recovery process this month has included:

- Team Devon Recovery Co-ordination Group (DRCG)
- DRCG sub groups including VCSE Recovery (co-Chairing fortnightly meetings); Data and Impact Assessment; Employability, Skills and Business
- Meetings with ACRE & NHS Devon re Rural Health Inequalities
- Local Resilience Forum (Vaccination) Volunteer Cell meetings
- Devon Together Alliance meeting
- Community Renewal Fund Devon briefings
- Community Leaders online hackathon (NHS remote consultations)
- Devon Food Partnership VCSE representation & Food Insecurity Consultation
- Developing support for people who need to self- isolate planning meeting
- Devon Rural Housing Partnership Board meeting
- East Devon Mental Health Support meeting

We have also contributed to national intelligence gathering to inform the recovery process, through providing regular intelligence reports and a final grant activities report as a registered Devon Local Infrastructure Organisation (LIO) for the NAVCA National VCSE Emergency Partnership.

Our Phase 5 research into the development of a volunteering legacy for Devon has continued this month, with online surveys and focus groups of local community groups and of individual volunteers. See section 3 for the report on these.

2.0 Covid-19 Local Outbreak and Recovery Helpline Activities

2.1 Group Type

There was a **total number of 66 helpline contacts** in April nearly all from community buildings and local councils, with two from a church and a Pilates group and two from individuals. The majority were contacts from village halls and parish councils spread across the county.

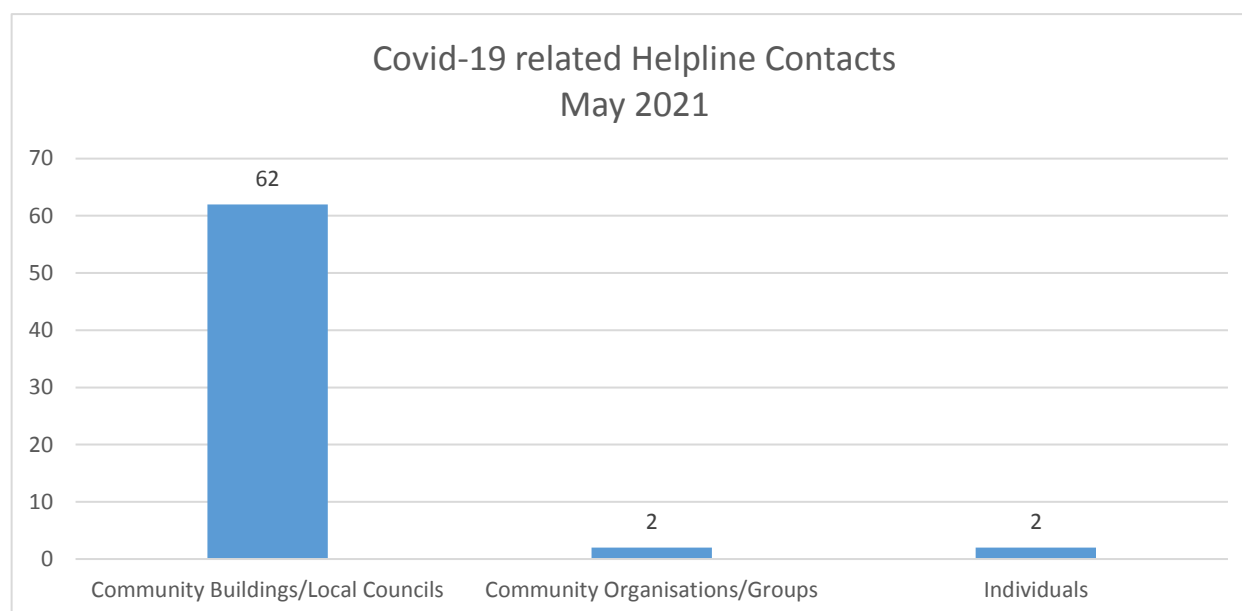


Figure 1: Bar chart illustrating total number of helpline contacts for May 2021.

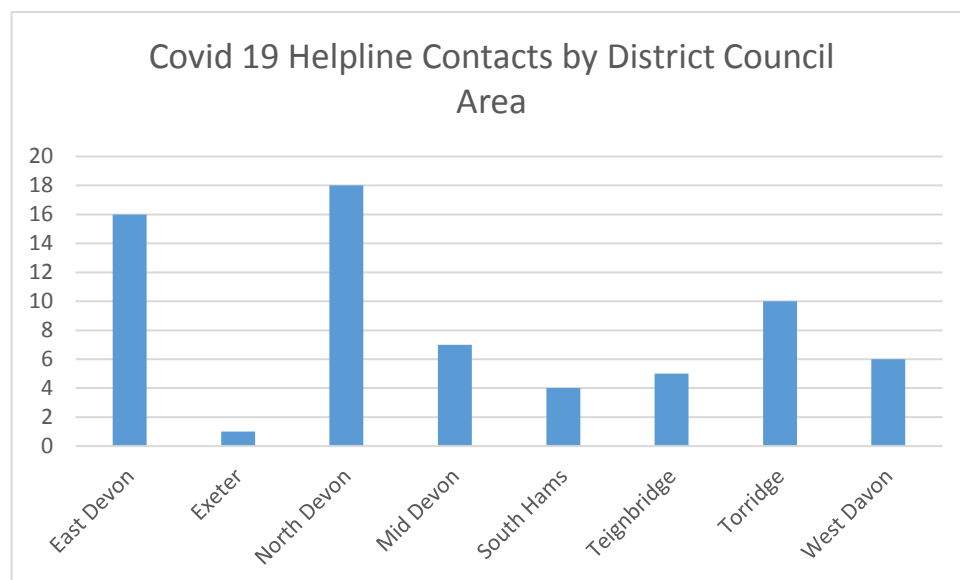


Figure 2: Bar chart illustrating contacts from community buildings and local councils in May 2021 by District area

2.2 Key Issues Identified May 2021

The majority of key issues identified on the Helpline for May were on Organisation and Management, Finance, and Health & Social Care. Table 1 below provides further details on this.

KEY ISSUES			
General Category	Frequency	Specific Issues	Details and Support Provided
Organisation and Management	55	Management of operations and community buildings, community organisations, and community groups.	<p>The majority of enquiries were from community building and village halls seeking guidance on safe re-opening after 17 May. There were 7 enquires about social distancing of audiences and numbers permitted in halls.</p> <p>As in April many enquires (25) related to what changes should be made to the hire terms and conditions of a hall to take account of Covid 19 safety, including notices, one way systems and one in-one out toilet arrangements.</p> <p>10 enquires dealt with activities in the buildings – e.g. serving food, parish council meetings, frequency of cleaning the hall.</p>

			<p>There were 2 requests for guidance on undertaking risk assessments – both by the hall and by the organisation wishing to use the hall for their activities,</p> <p>There were 6 enquires relating to outside activities – in particular. 1 the safe Covid 19 practice when operating a community BBQ and 5 concerning the wearing of masks by parents/carers in play areas.</p> <p>DCT helpline staff provided assistance to all contacts. This included dissemination of key information such as the ACRE guidance for Village halls, since this often provides clarity on guidelines specifically for village halls and community buildings. DCT also forwarded CCG guidance on Covid 19 arrangements and information.</p>
Finance	11	Financial Support	<p>All 10 queries in May were from community buildings or village halls in respect of obtaining or using Covid 19 restart or recovery grants. These related to the availability of grants in particular District areas, understanding the applications process, or advice in filling in the claim forms. There was also two requests for help in framing applications to National Lottery and to the Community Renewal Fund.</p> <p>All enquirers were given bespoke advice and information by phone or email on where and how to apply for funds. As per April's Covid 19 report, the assistance re applications for re-start grants and other funds took time to a) listen to the specific issues, b) ask questions c) provide bespoke advice – average 30 mins per request for help.</p>

Table 1: Table showing and providing details on specific issues identified in May 21

3.0 The Legacy of Covid 19 Volunteering

3.1 Survey 2021 to volunteers and local voluntary groups

This month, in Phase 5, DCT expanded on the light touch research conducted in March of community-based mutual aid schemes' activities. We sought to gather insights and evidence from both COVID-19 mutual aid groups and volunteers to understand the best way to harness the energy of community volunteers as a positive legacy into the future. The wider voluntary, community and social enterprise sector plays a vital role, directly supporting communities, nurturing community organisations and providing services on behalf of statutory health and social care organisations. We wanted to understand more about the operational challenges faced by these small groups, operating informally at grassroots well as understanding more about how the groups overcame the practical issues e.g. communicating with volunteers and shielding residents during lockdown, handling cash and applying for grants.

It has also become very apparent through the number of older people shielding in the first 6 months of the pandemic, that the bulk of routine local volunteering activities in rural communities is undertaken by those over the age of 60. During the crisis period, younger people stepped up to help. But when these younger people returned to work after furlough, the pool of volunteers who were available to support community activities dried up. It is therefore vital that communities plan now how they can make local community volunteering more attractive or available to younger members of the community so that community resilience is built in to withstand another emergency.

Through conducting surveys of both the mutual aid groups and of the individual volunteers they engaged, we sought, secondly, to get grassroots insights into the appetite of groups and volunteers for more centralised support such as a centralised volunteer database system, and the possibility of a 'volunteer passport'.

Thirdly, we aimed to understand whether the groups and particularly the individual volunteers in these groups were keen to continue their volunteering activities by linking in to other community groups, for example their emergency planning group or climate emergency group.

3.2 Methodology

The methods we used to engage with groups and volunteers were:

- a) Online Surveys. One survey with questions tailored to voluntary groups and one survey for individual volunteers.
- b) Focus group discussions for mutual aid group representatives to explore the themes that emerge in the survey in more detail and for individual volunteers to discuss what will enable and support them to continue to offer volunteering time.

Survey questions we asked the co-ordinators of mutual aid groups were:

- How did the group form – in existence already, or in response to pandemic?
- Where did support to form and run the group come from e.g. local authorities or other voluntary groups?
- How many volunteers in the group at peak?
- Status now – active, dormant, disbanded?
- People and processes that helped or hindered the group function?
- How tasks were managed?
- Communications and referrals?
- Dealing with complaints, concerns from volunteers?
- Challenges faced?
- What areas of community activity might the group, if still active, like to get involved with?

Survey questions we asked individual volunteers related to:

- Their motivations for volunteering in the pandemic
- How they found the processes of recruitment, management and support of volunteers in the group
- Whether they are still volunteering
- The potential for them to volunteer in the future.

We had good responses to both surveys (47 responses from voluntary groups and 47 responses from individual volunteers – see appendices for breakdown of survey responses, session plan and notes of voluntary groups discussion).

3.3 Post Survey Focus Group Discussions Plan

Voluntary groups

1. Introduction and housekeeping (5 mins)
 - a. The session is following up on the survey and helping us to accurately report on the needs and thoughts of volunteer groups ref a post cv19 legacy. We will be revealing some of the trends in the survey for discussion, and hope it will also be a useful session for you to enable reflection and consolidate your future direction.
 - b. Reporting to DCC
 - c. Recording session to aid our reporting
 - d. Please put your name in the chat, turn off your microphone when not speaking, raise hand
2. Poll, who is in the room, share results(5 mins)
3.
 - a. In the survey we asked about the confidence of groups to deal with various aspects of volunteer organisation. The main areas in which respondents were most likely to struggle and lack structure were; handling money and reimbursement, volunteer induction and training, recording task completion, and handling complaints.
Thinking about these areas and your experience, are there any overarching structures or support that you feel would have helped your group overcome these difficulties at the time? (20 mins)
 - b. (if not covered) We also gave some options in the survey for support structures; national and county volunteer passports, training, software, and a dedicated contact advisor. Do you think this/they could have helped overcome your difficulties? (10 mins)
4. Looking forward, in the survey, we listed a number of areas where groups that provided COVID-19 support may like to get involved with in the future. The top two most popular areas overall from the survey results were; helping those with additional needs, and community emergency planning alongside being an emergency response only group. The least popular areas for future involvement were the road warden and parish paths scheme, active living groups, creative groups, community transport, and climate emergency groups.
In many ways this reflects activities that are most and least similar to COVID-19 response, but not all, can you explain the reasons why your group would or would not take on some of these volunteering activities? (15 mins)
5. If time – go around the room, everyone to share the thing that worked best of all / top tip for organizing their volunteer group.

Thank participants, advise the report will go on our website in July. Suggest sign up to DCRF mailing list (link in chat)

Both the groups and individual volunteer surveys went live from 4 May and were widely publicised through ebulletins and social media.

Help create a post COVID-19 volunteer legacy

During the pandemic many people came forward to volunteer and many local mutual aid and other volunteer groups rapidly formed. There are lessons to learn about volunteer structures and possibilities to help shape the future of local volunteering. DCT are collecting information to report to Devon County Council to help shape this future.

If you ran a group that organised volunteers during the pandemic take the survey here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/6JZ8KDK>

and sign up to our follow up event here:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/volunteer-structures-and-support-a-session-for-covid-19-mutual-aid-groups-tickets-151085708421>

If you were a volunteer during the pandemic, take the survey here –

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/6XCMKHM> and sign up to our follow up event here -

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/volunteer-structures-and-support-a-session-for-covid-19-volunteers-tickets-151082683373>

Fig 1: copy of ebulletin text advertising volunteer groups and volunteering survey 4 May 21

4.0 Survey Responses Voluntary Groups (47 responses)

4.1 Voluntary Groups

Summary. 47 groups responded to the survey. Although the recruitment was open to any groups, it was evident from the responses that these were predominantly from groups in rural villages and market towns. 26 groups (55%) had not existed before the pandemic and formed in direct response. 16 groups (24%) adapted an existing group or joined together with other groups to provide a local co-ordinated response. 5 groups existed in the same structure as before the pandemic.

Of all these groups, a large percentage - 31 (66%) are still active, 14 (30%) are dormant or largely dormant and 2 groups (4%) have disbanded.

Perhaps surprisingly, since so many of the groups had not existed before the pandemic and had to respond quickly to requests for help, 89% of groups felt they had fairly good or very good systems for the recruitment of volunteers and 66% felt that they had fairly good or good induction procedures for volunteers.

Most groups had at least working processes for induction and safeguarding and only 1 group felt that their processes around safeguarding and GDPR were of actual concern. It should be noted that only 6 groups felt confident in the induction and training of volunteers who came forward to help. This echoed the feedback from groups earlier in the pandemic – that they had set up their groups quickly, using processes such as Facebook, Trello or What's App to quickly communicate with volunteers and assign them to tasks. The need for speed to address the crisis may, however, have come at the expense of more measured processes of induction and training of volunteers that take place in more mature, established groups.

The responses to the question about activities that groups are already involved in/would like to get involved in showed that around a third of groups were already involved in the activities of food distribution, supporting individuals and community transport, road warden, parish paths or emergency planning. A third of responses showed that these types of activities were not attractive to groups, or the groups had already disbanded. The opportunity for growth may therefore come with the approx. third of groups which said they would be interested to learn more about or undertake these and other volunteering roles.

Help via volunteering infrastructure support structures were popular/interesting to over 50% of responders. In Fig 3.

The 'Other' responses were:

- Did not need support (4 of 17)
- Town or parish council (4 of 17)
- Others within the group (4 of 17)
- Other community groups including church and GP surgery (5 of 17)
- County and District councils or Cllr (2 of 17)

Some described more than one source of support hence 19 in total)

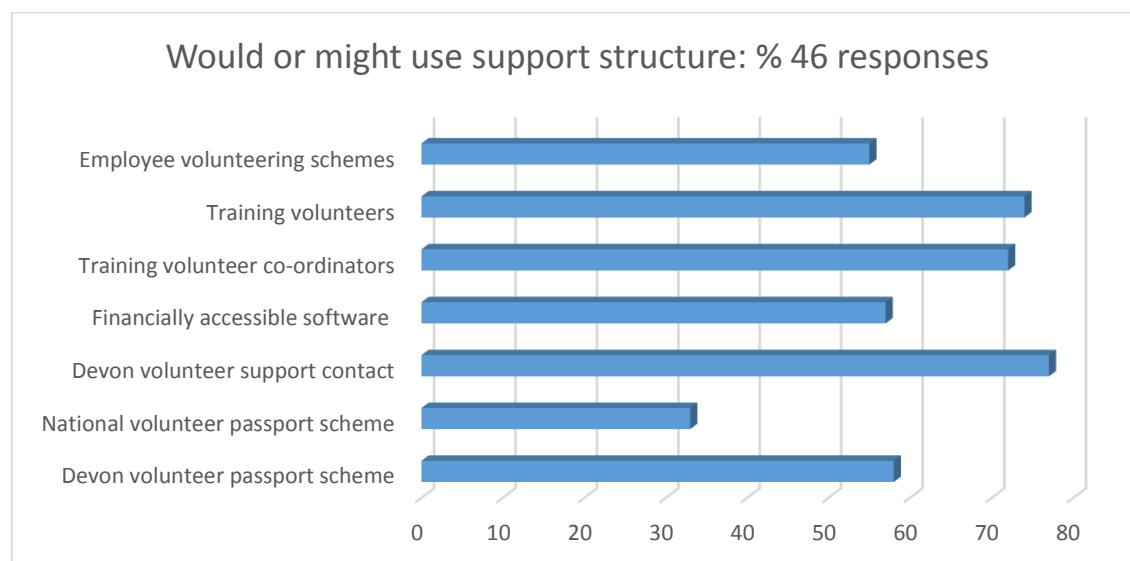


Fig 2: Types of volunteering support structures

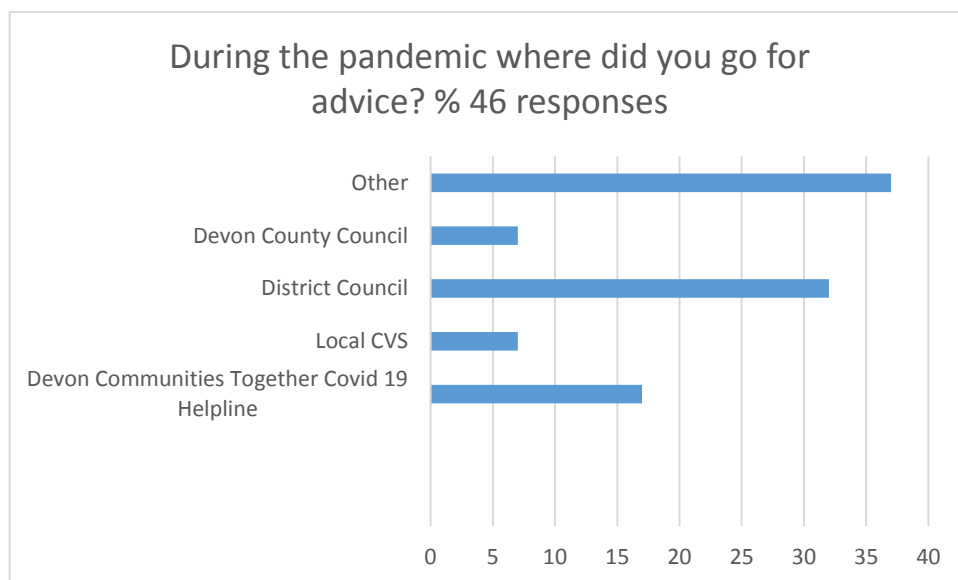


Fig 3: Advice and support for groups during pandemic

5.0 Voluntary Groups Focus/Discussion Group Session

Registered to attend 12

Attendance 4 – plus DCF Insight Co-ordinator

Attendance from Membury, Okehampton (2), Sid Valley Help, Ashford

Facilitator – Louise MacAllister DCT, Notes Hannah Reynolds DCT

1. **Poll results** – 3 out of 4 groups were started from scratch; 2 groups with 20 – 79 volunteers, 2 groups with 80 – 120
2. **Active or Dormant now?** – One group still very active, others dormant but ready to rise if another emergency and undertaking other parish projects.
3. **What challenges arose for you in setting up or supporting your group?**
 - a) **Receiving Grant Money**
Representative quote: 'Setting up from scratch, we didn't have a bank account for grant money to be paid into. Grants paid into town council bank account, which made lot of work for the Clerk'.
 - b) **Volunteers helping people with significant health issues**

These still form the major part of the still-active groups' support. During lockdown, one group was supporting people with domestic abuse, mental health and debt issues. The group received assistance from the District Council of people to help with these issues. The group felt it was lucky that there were very skilled and experienced health or debt professionals among the volunteers, otherwise they would have struggled to cope.

c) Safeguarding

Representative quote. *'We did the best we could. We only took people who we knew and who were prepared to share all their contact details. But we didn't have time or money to go through formal admin processes of DBS'.*

d) Residents accessing cash to pay for shopping

Many older or vulnerable residents didn't have access to online banking to transfer money for shopping. In one parish the local shop fulfilled the shopping list the volunteer brought in and then phoned the resident for credit card details. In another parish, local society cash receipts from an event that hadn't yet been banked were used as a local bank for people to access cash in exchange for a cheque.

4. What sorts of activities did your group take on?

All groups organised shopping, pharmacy and essential food as well as visiting vulnerable residents to make sure they were coping. One group was also providing (and continues to provide) support for those with complex issues e.g. domestic abuse or debt. One group also created a collection point for receipt of food and raw materials e.g. flour, milk, which they then parcelled up and delivered round the village.

5. How did your group support itself and communicate with residents and volunteers?

Two groups – 1 town, 1 parish – set up a Facebook page for communications. This was used too by relatives of vulnerable residents. Even international posts from relatives seeking to know how their relative was faring during the pandemic. Two groups used existing parish newsletters which were used to recruit volunteers, pass information and also to give light-hearted jokes and quizzes to keep spirits up. Both these newsletters have taken on a life of their own since the lockdowns, with more items coming in than before.

One group, which had existed before the pandemic, used their very good relationship with the town council, as well as their existing means of communication. This was helpful, as the number of volunteers quickly rose from 8 before the lockdown to 120 during lockdown.

6. The Future

One group is very active still, another had started village projects e.g. gardening packs for children or birdbox making on the back of the volunteering during lockdown. In some cases 'the people who needed help have now made their own relationships with people who helped them, with neighbours and others in the community'. Three groups were largely dormant apart from occasional people for whom help was continuing. Many of the volunteers were of working age and had gone back to work. One group mentioned a difficulty with knowing which volunteers had left the group and which were still available for volunteering. Databases of volunteers still exist in all the groups, which could be used again if another emergency arose.

7. What, if any centralised support structures would be useful for community-based groups in another emergency?

Two groups felt that a national or Devon volunteer passport scheme would be helpful as it would avoid the bureaucracy and costs of DBS checks. ‘Volunteers could flash their volunteer passport card, or the organisation could look them up on a central database’.

One group would like a central agency to hold and administer funds for groups during an emergency to avoid the administrative load on the group or the local Council.

One group is considering setting up a CIO in response to an ongoing demand for its services – and would like an agency they could apply to for help with setting up such a group and its governance.

8. How do we keep the volunteers engaged who stepped up during the pandemic?

‘People respond in relation to the situation. Situation engenders commitment’

Two groups had similar stories of volunteering through a large agency e.g. NHS Volunteers or Vaccinators where they had to fill in lots of forms/jumping hoops and then were never called to volunteer, or who were turned down by the NHS as vaccinator despite long experience doing similar work.

All agreed – ‘there’s an appetite for volunteering, but it depends what you do’. The consensus was that people volunteer when their heart or interest is stirred to volunteer. Any administration structure should enable them to volunteer more easily for an activity that interests them and for which they have skills – rather than becoming an administrative centre for those who would volunteer anyway.

5.2 Volunteers Survey Responses (47 responses)

Summary: Volunteers joined a group, often a newly-formed group, overwhelmingly (96%) because they wanted to help their community. 74% of the volunteers were aged 55+ and all but 3 of the 47 volunteers were actively volunteering at the time of the pandemic or had volunteered in the past.

70% were continuing to volunteer now, and 30% had ceased volunteering but were prepared to volunteer again if an emergency arose.

The responses from volunteers to the question about areas of concern in their volunteering were similar to those of the voluntary groups. They generally felt they had had a very positive experience. However, around 20% of volunteers felt there could be improvement in the areas of induction, safeguarding and practical support in distressing/upsetting situations.

There was little interest shown in the responses in taking on standard volunteering roles in rural communities of road warden, flood warden, parish paths or community transport. Instead volunteers would be interested to know more about opportunities to volunteer with issue-based projects that caught their interest such as climate emergency, environmental protection projects, emergency planning or creative projects in the community. This bears out the views of those in the voluntary groups’ discussion that *‘there’s an appetite for volunteering, but it depends what you do’*.

74% of volunteers might be or would definitely be interested in a Devon-based volunteer passport. This echoes the voluntary groups' responses, too, in that there is markedly more interest in a Devon volunteer passport than being part of a national scheme.

The importance of 'local' and benefits of volunteer training and support were emphasised where 92% of volunteers said they would be interested in volunteering where there were 'local, well-organised groups to join', with 81% stressing the importance of access to volunteer training. For detailed breakdown of responses see appendix.

Examples of volunteers' responses:

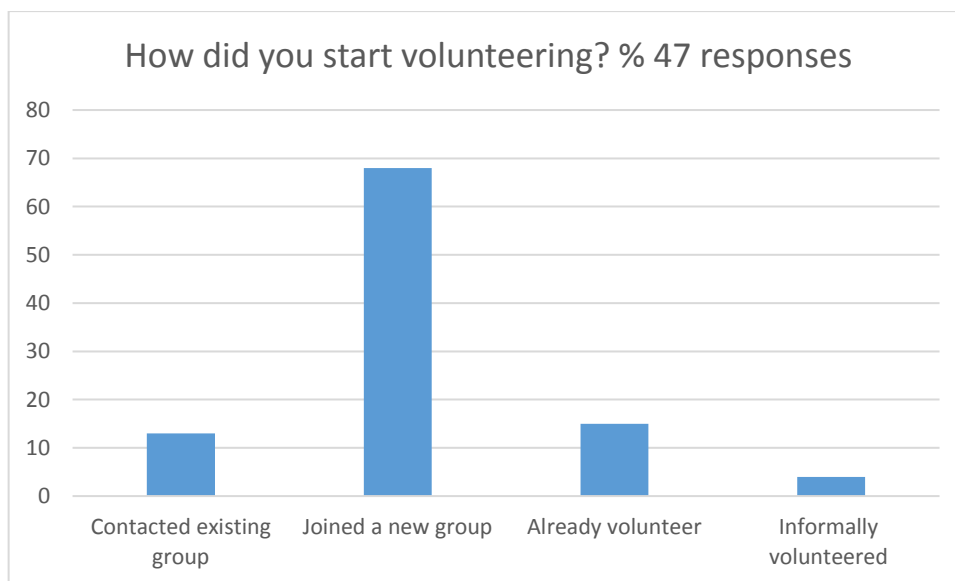


Fig 4: How did you start volunteering?

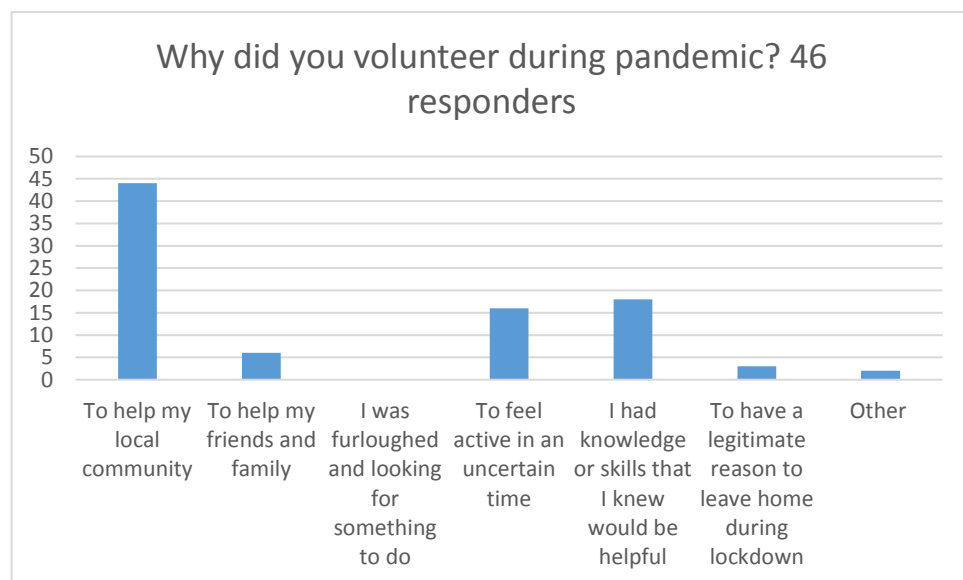


Fig 5: Why did you volunteer during pandemic?

5.3 Volunteers Focus/Discussion Group

Only one volunteer attended the focus/discussion group although 7 had registered to attend. The following is therefore a case study from the session of this volunteer, Jane (not her real name).

Jane was a volunteer in a small town in Devon through the pandemic. She had previously volunteered a lot but was taking a volunteering hiatus when the pandemic struck. She joined the local mutual aid group which was very well organized. As Jane enjoys logistics she helped organize volunteer rotas and logistics. This was a fairly significant amount of work throughout the first 12 months of the pandemic but then began to tail off.

However the mutual aid group has started to take on new tasks in the community around food provision and Jane has continued to work with the group to support these new roles for the group and plans to continue to do this.

She is very impressed with her local mutual aid group and the extent to which they have formalized the group to continue into the future. She is aware that their town is reasonably privileged and although it does have poverty it also has a strong core of people with a range of expertise who were able to draw on their background and skills to run the group.

Jane thought the volunteer passport idea could be useful locally, and thought it would be especially good for new people coming into a community who may want to volunteer. Her sister is in this position having recently moved and XXX described how she has had to send of numerous times for references for different volunteering opportunities which becomes quite off putting.

6.0 Communications

6.1 Website

During May 2021, the DCT website pages received the following number of total views:

- Welcome/home page (which features 5 links to the coronavirus information page and helpline information): **1,166 views**
- Coronavirus information page (which features helpline information and multiple subpages): **324 views, which was the third most viewed page in the site**
- Re-opening Village Halls guidance: **105 views**
- Devon Community Resilience Forum project page: **87 views**
- Small registered charity grants information: **58 views**
- Advice for Community Buildings: **60 views**
- The Devon Community Resilience Forum resources page: **33 views**

Of the above pages, the page with the highest viewing time over the last month was the Coronavirus Information page. This received a viewing time of **4 minutes and 51 seconds**.

6.2 E-bulletins

During March 21, a total number of **2 e-bulletins** featuring covid-19 resources, advice and updates have been sent to our Village Halls, Community Buildings and Town & Parish council contacts, as well as our social enterprise contacts where appropriate. Examples of content include:

Latest Covid-19 updates and resources from Devon Communities Together 20th May 2021

This bulletin featured information regarding the next step in the roadmap and return to play grant funding.

Latest Covid-19 updates and resources from Devon Communities Together 6th May 2021

This bulletin contained information on Volunteering after Covid19, DCT meetings in village halls and community buildings.

6.2 Social Media Activity Table

30/05/21	Twitter, Facebook, linkedIN	Did you volunteer during Covid? We're collecting info to report to Devon County Council to help shape the future of local volunteering. Take a survey here: https://buff.ly/2RM4zCt / sign up to our follow up event: https://buff.ly/3eEAz4N Help create a post CV19 volunteer legacy!	Reach (fb): 105 Impressions (t/Li): 91 Retweets: 0 Likes: 3 Shares: 3 Clicks: 5
11/05/21	Twitter, Facebook, linkedIN	<p>Help create a post COVID-19 volunteer legacy</p> <p>During the pandemic many people came forward to volunteer and many local mutual aid and other volunteer groups rapidly formed. There are lessons to learn about volunteer structures and possibilities to help shape the future of local volunteering. DCT are collecting information to report to Devon County Council to help shape this future.</p> <p>If you ran a group that organised volunteers during the pandemic take the survey here https://buff.ly/3biWeNw and sign up to our follow up event here – https://buff.ly/3ezafsG</p> <p>If you were a volunteer during the pandemic, take the survey here - https://buff.ly/2RM4zCt and sign up to our follow up event here - https://buff.ly/3eEAz4N</p>	Reach (fb): Impressions (t/Li): 373 Retweets: 2 Likes: 1 Shares: 7 Clicks: 6
10/05/21	Twitter, Facebook, linkedIN	Our Covid-19 helpline is open every weekday from 9am to 5pm. if you have a question or want advice then give us a call on 0808 1963390. Alternatively to find out more about the Covid-19 helpline, click here: https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/coronavirus-information?fbclid=IwAR1xigzB0ak7MJv0AoeDBEANt7BaJ1VeN2jkPh0QggjUiEziKEZA1ksaZWs	Reach (fb): 309 Impressions (t/Li): 17 Retweets: 0 Likes: 5 Shares: 3 Clicks: 4

Examples of posts across all social media



7.0 Appendices – separate documents:

1. Survey Responses – Voluntary Groups
2. Survey Responses – Volunteers