Camden Covid-19 VCS Support Survey

April 2020

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Introduction

When the emergency began VAC surveyed all organisations in Camden to find out how they were adapting to meet the challenge of the Covid-19 emergency. The results of that survey (and ongoing updates) was published online in the Camden Covid-19 Community Directory. As part of that survey we also asked the VCS organisations for their general support needs and what specifically they would like from VAC as well as their specific volunteer needs. Many of them also raised general concerns which we have collated as well. More than 130 responses were received. The situation is rapidly unfolding and many participants made the point that needs were changing and developing rapidly. As result we intend to repeat the support needs survey in May; however, all respondents have also received a unique link where they can update their directory details when needed.

Early on VAC set out three aims for ourselves:

1. Create a directory so that people can find out which Camden organisations are active and what they are doing so that residents in need can be directed to support.
2. Disseminate up-to-date information on funding, central and local government plans, legal advice etc and support Camden organisations
3. Help the sector link up vulnerable residents with statutory and non-statutory help via safe volunteers

The survey was a practical way to address aims 1 and 2 and gave us useful information to inform our work on 3.

Challenges and Concerns

Although the survey was focussed on support needs and volunteer requirements many made reference to more general concerns and challenges.

1. **Time is of the essence** - the crisis unfolded rapidly – there was an immediate impact on users and organisations – immediate loss of income, immediate need to respond to users, immediate need to incur costs without knowing where they would come from – an immediate need to implement remote working systems in order to carry on.
2. **Clear information** was needed so that community groups could let residents know about the situation. What to do, where and when to go for help, and how to access clear information accessible to all including in community languages, easy read. Groups faced the uncertainty of not knowing how they could meet users' needs and demands.
3. **Contact points and referral pathways** were initially unclear leaving community groups and residents unsure who to turn to for help. Responses from pharmacies, GP Surgeries and the council were inconsistent and unclear.
4. **Payments and money** concerned many. People dependent on cash were running out and either couldn't access their own funds or had no funds. March was cold and some residents were unable to top up electricity and gas pre-payment keys and mobile phones (which are often the only way to get online).
5. **The digital divide** is now very stark. Large numbers of vulnerable people, not just older people, are not online. Information, support, shopping, prescription ordering, and health support - much of the official and mainstream response has been online, marginalising the very people who need help the most.
6. **Isolation, stress, burn out, bereavement, separation**. Mental health and wellbeing were raised as concerns that many felt ill equipped to deal with and created anxiety about the future.

Summary

Support Needs (in priority order):

1   reported concerns about funding including the furlough scheme

2   had Covid-19 specific concerns

3   were related to technology and digital

4   cited concerns about their capacity to meet users' needs

5   cited employment and HR need (though there was some cross over with funding as the furlough scheme was often raised under both headings.

6   Signposting and general help with networking

Volunteering Needs

1. wanted volunteers to help with meal preparation and delivery

2. wanted volunteers who could offer support by phone (check-in, befriending etc)

3. wanted tech support volunteers ranging from supporting digitally excluded people to get online to internal support with website, databases, phones and videoconferencing. Also wanted were remote systems admin volunteers and help with setting up online webinars and moving activities (such as mindfulness and other activities) online.

4. wanted general operations/admin volunteers

5. wanted prescription pick up volunteers

6. wanted volunteer manager/coordinators

7. wanted dog walking volunteers

8. wanted volunteers to distribute printed newsletters

Miscellaneous roles wanted included: Play supervisors; activity leaders, SEN children play volunteers, skill sharing;

Expectations of VAC

1. wanted VAC's support with Fundraising

2. wanted VAC's support with Covid-19 related issues

3. wanted VAC's support with IT and Technology

VCS Support Needs

Need	Detail of Need	VAC Response
Funding	Accessing Emergency Funding; Sources of Funding; Accessing very small sums; Emergency Funds for Individuals in need; covering lunch costs; Finding very small	Lobbying: VAC has co-signed an open letter calling for support from the council including a rent holiday and flexibility with grants and up-front payments. VAC has issued a press release calling for an easing of furlough requirements and better support for VCS organisation from government.

	sums for DBS checks, mobile top ups etc; Funding strategy; Liaising with funders; Core costs; Replacing lost earned income;	Information: VAC has maintained a daily update page, daily twitter and weekly e-bulletin to keep VCS up to date. Funding resources have been gathered in one place on the website. The London Community Response fund and Camden Giving are the main sources of early support. A large national response via the lottery is expected imminently. Many other funds have started. We have maintained almost daily updates to ensure VCS orgs are up to date with available funding and we have posted on the website a list of small grants for individuals in need as well.
Information	Accessible information; information in community languages; referral points;	Members have told us they need timely, accurate and concise information in order to support their users and keep their organisations going. VAC, working with our national and London wide partners, has sourced and disseminated the best and most up to date information. Updated daily on the Covid-19 Update page and twitter. Information that is accessible to all is also needed and we have worked to find reputable translations of much key information as well as easy read versions. There are some gaps in the provision of clear contact points and referral points into the council and VAC has used its many routes into the council to lobby to improve the situation. VAC will disseminate this information as it emerges.
Covid-19 specific	Insurance Issues; Access to PPE	Through national partners VAC has sourced and disseminated guides to insurance and other legal issues to help organisations adapt to the emergency. VAC is circulating the latest PPE advice from Camden and Islington Public Health
Technology/ Digital	Help with Social Media; ideas to make the website interactive; Remote Working; Getting laptops and phones;	VAC recognises that the rapid need to work remotely and transform face to face activities to online and telephone has created challenges for organisations and individuals. VAC has gathered a range of resources including sharing our own guide to remote meetings. VAC is running a free weekly Digital and Tech support Q and A on Tuesdays from 2 – 3.30pm to help the sector with digital issues.
Capacity to Meet User's Needs	Knowledge of the response systems in place, triage, the council and health systems being set up, the VCS response.	As part of the Care Navigation/Social Prescribing system in Camden the Community Links team at VAC has disseminated information to the VCS about the working of the team and the broader Social Prescribing system in Camden, reassuring the community that that residents' needs can be met through the existing referral system.
Employment and HR	Support to explain the furlough scheme for small charities;	VAC has been gathering and disseminating guidance from reputable sources on the Furlough scheme and other common HR issues. In addition we have continued to offer our 121 support by email and phone. On 20th April VAC is running a free online workshop on the Furlough Scheme.
Signposting and Networking	Help with referrals between areas (more volunteers than can use); Signposting to specialist organisations; Networking Camden Organisations;	VAC has produced a Covid-19 Community Directory to show how organisations have adapted and transformed during the crisis. The directory is updated continuously and is being widely used for referrals for support and networking. VAC has continued to answer signposting queries by phone and email.

		On 22ⁿᵈ April VAC are holding an open meeting for Camden VCS organisations to update each other and VAC will share the latest intelligence on the local situation.
Volunteering	Making Time to Spare user friendly; Sourcing seconded staff; Finding volunteers	VAC has been taking part in the working group developing the volunteering system in Camden feeding back insights from VCS organisations on the front line to improve the system. VAC has raised this with the council and they are actively looking at the possibility of redeploying council staff into VCS organisations or in a way that provides support to VCS organisations.
Misc	Access to online training for befriending, safeguarding etc; Promotion; helping source food donations; Access to Debt, housing and benefits Advice; Becoming a Food Bank; Sourcing Food Donations; Business Continuity Planning;	VAC has been gathering resources on a wide range of topics on our website where they are easily accessible. We have gathered a range of online videos and training materials on safeguarding, befriending, etc. For foodbanks, we have a link into the Deputy Mayor's task group on food via London Plus so can be a conduit for information etc. We are working to find resources in response to a wide range of requests and as we find them they are posted on the resources page and the daily update page and twitter.

COVID-19 RESOURCES

VAC has gathered relevant resources on a range of topics:

- Local Support Directories
- General Support Resources for Charities
- Templates
- Funding
- Food
- Remote Working and Tech Support
- Finance
- Personal Finance
- Employees and HR
- Furloughing Staff (Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme)
- Volunteering
- Helping Neighbours
- Health and Well-Being

Expectations/Response of VAC + Our Role in the Future

Short term

- Keeping VCS up-to-date with information updates, the e-bulletin, twitter
- Maintaining an accurate directory for networking and support referrals
- Supporting organisations to move to working remotely and use online tools.
- Finding and sharing the latest and most appropriate funding opportunities
- Lobbying for support from funders, the public sector and local press
- Ensuring a VCS presence at strategic meetings and on working groups

Medium term

- Help organisations to adapt and survive in the new climate
- Help organisations to transform themselves to work in new ways
- Keep organisations connected and supported as necessary

Long term

- Advocate for a 'new deal' with health and social care systems with long term, evidence based funding for the sector's role in a future community health system.
- Advocate to revisit some underlying assumptions, in particular charges for community assets such as buildings and spaces being related to 'market values' rather than their social value.
- Advocate for the sector as a whole, but also making sure that the underrepresented are heard as well and that their voices aren't ignored in the future struggle for resources.
- Take part in a thorough evaluation of what worked and what didn't and why. Consider the risks of leaving the VCS too under resourced and unprepared and look at how we can be better prepared as a sector in future.

Case Studies

The Covid-19 Community Directory contains entries from over 70 organisations across Camden who are working to meet the challenge of the current emergency. Here are just a few examples:

SHAK

15 volunteers engaged in daily jobs supporting residents who are isolating delivering shopping, prescriptions, calling for friendly chats.
Services have moved online including Youth sessions via Instagram - cooking, music, forums. Groups around health and well-being, cooking and older residents' engagements using zoom, WhatsApp and the good old phone.

10 residents without online connections will get a free Tablet and support to enable them to use online calls, health apps, etc. with the "Good Things Foundation"

Age UK Camden centres have been transform into bases preparing emergency food parcels as part of an Emergency Appeal. Home visits and outreach services have been replaced with alternative packages of care to include telephone befriending and counselling. In 24hrs an appeal raised £25k and over 100 volunteers applied. A 'Convalescence at Home' package of support has been created for those recovering. An Online Book Club was launched, part of a 'Wellbeing and Resilience Package' designed to support those in self-isolation during the Coronavirus outbreak. AUC has taken part in a major patient discharge programme. Care Navigation, Ageing Better and many other AUC services are adapting and continuing to deal with high demand.

The Euston Foodbank is continuing with four distribution sessions per week. Keep updated on the website https://euston.foodbank.org.uk/
Tuesday 12-4pm
Thursday 5:30-7pm
Saturday 11-12:30
Sunday 2-3:30
Supplies ran low over the Easter weekend and the GLA organised some emergency food deliveries by the Red Cross to replenish stocks. UHT milk has been in very short supply recently. Demand has been higher than normal.

Cooperation Kentish Town started at in 2019 as part of an autonomous movement around the country in response to food poverty and austerity. "Over the last couple of days we distributed over 800 meals to vulnerable people with the support of The Felix Project and a handful of local organisers and volunteers. We sourced, stored, packed and delivered nutritious food to where it was most needed, we collaborated with disability, homelessness and refugees support organisations - an entire operation built on trust, not transaction. We did all this with no support from the council or the government, without asking for permission or depending on any centrally authorised system. We proved that, when the state fails us, we will organise ourselves and our communities"

Third Age Project
@ThirdAgeProject

TAP Weekly Newsletter - mailchi.mp/49fa08a7beb8/t...

A report has just been published for your GoodGym task to help [REDACTED] on Tuesday, 14th of April 2020.

VAC's **Community Links** team is one of the linked programmes that make up the Care Navigation/Social Prescribing service in Camden. The number of referrals to Community Links has shot up and we have had to find new volunteers as the nature of the response has changed from connecting people into their community to running missions such as collecting a prescriptions, shopping and errands. Goodgym have been invaluable and GoodSam is also proving its worth. Community links has a Freephone and NHS email and takes referrals from GPs, individuals and family members. The team have taken calls from worried family members with elderly relatives from as far afield as Edinburgh. People needing support has ranged from elderly people; families all with complex needs; family on low income with young children running out of food and money; elderly convalescents needing hot meals. AUC food parcels and Wish+ have also been invaluable.

Hampstead Volunteer Corps
The Corps is one of many 'mutual aid' groups that set up as autonomous community groups, bands of neighbours or friends who have often used social media like WhatsApp to organiser and respond to the current situation in their immediate neighbourhood. Mutual aid groups are based on trust and so are very locally based, often just one street. The Corps is linking into them and is more ambitious than most in covering the whole of Hampstead. The initial volunteers who set up the Corps have been joined by over 200 volunteers and structures have evolved to divide the area up, coordinate with local Charites, churches and the council. Initially responding to calls for help from self-isolating residents, the Corps is now planning for more ambitious responses, including meals and telephone support for isolated neighbours.

Busy #Camden #StreetsKitchen this eve
💡 BIG thanks to some genius's taping the pavement in two-meter gaps it was pretty easy to ensure safe distancing & a strict safe procedure for everyone to receive much needed hot meals & a visit from the #EasterBunny with LOTS of 🍫eggs 🐰🐾