

Dumfries and Galloway Council
Scottish Government Covid-19 Hardship Fund
Year End Report 2020/2021

A summary of how the Scottish Government COVID-19 Hardship Funds were allocated in Dumfries and Galloway and the impacts and lessons learned was reported to the Communities Committee of Dumfries and Galloway Council on the 9th April 2021 and is available [here](#). This report provides a detailed insight into how funds were allocated as well as performance information and case studies and personal testimonies describing the impacts on beneficiaries and partners.

Introduction

Dumfries and Galloway Council was allocated £1.48m from the Scottish Government Hardship Fund. At its meeting on 27 March 2020 the Ad Hoc COVID-19 Sub Committee agreed the allocation of the Hardship Fund, and a further £5k from the Community Planning and Engagement Service budget, towards a range of urgent support needs, identified by Third Sector organisations and Council services: food supplies; food preparation; volunteer transport and expenses; housing and homelessness; connectivity; and advice and information.

Additional Scottish Government funding targeted at people who were non-shielding but at risk was subsequently allocated to Dumfries and Galloway Council, of which £106k was allocated for community food and was distributed to 16 Community Food Providers to provide further support for food supplies; food preparation; volunteer transport and expenses.

The NHS D&G Endowment Fund contributed £30k towards community resilience activity. In addition, community organisations have been applying to a range of funding sources over the past 12 months. During this period, Third Sector organisations have been successful in attracting more than £9m to the region which we estimate to be, at least, our region's 'fair share' by head of population. This welcome additional funding has come from a number of sources including Scottish Government Small Business Grant Scheme and Response, Recovery and Resilience Fund; Magnox and Nuclear Decommissioning Authority; Tesco's Bags of Help Fund; and the Martin Lewis Coronavirus Charity Help Fund. These grants are mainly for the ongoing running costs of the organisations (e.g., rates and staff salaries) which complements the project funding of the Hardship Fund and community food allocations.

South of Scotland Enterprise has contributed an additional £76k and Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway (TSDG) a further £10k towards “Connecting D&G”. The Connecting D&G project originally funded through the hardship fund took a coordinated approach to connecting people by providing them with digital devices, wifi and support from digital champion volunteers. The project targets individuals and families who are vulnerable to exclusion through lack of access to a device or connectivity.

Scottish Government has since made a further fund available “Addressing Future Need to Support Individuals at Financial Risk” from October 2020 to January 2021. Dumfries and Galloway received an award of £716k and this has been allocated to cover increased costs associated with the Scottish Welfare Fund, Discretionary Housing Payments and Free School Meals.

Category 1 - Community Food Providers

Background
<p>COVID-19 pandemic has had considerable social and economic impacts on households. Income losses arising from the COVID-19 crisis have significantly contributed to an increase in the number of persons who are food insecure with shutdowns and restrictions creating new layers of hardship and food insecurity.</p> <p>Food insecurity is a lack of access to adequate or appropriate food due to a lack of resources; these challenges have hit all communities throughout the region, but some groups have been identified as being more at risk.</p> <p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financially at-risk households • Marginalised households • Short term isolators, including those asked to self-isolate under Test and Protect • People at increased or extreme clinical risk from Coronavirus and required to undertake stringent physical distancing • People unable to access food and/or essentials due to other barriers. <p>Initially we identified 19 key Community Food Providers who were recognised as having strength and experience in supporting their communities in relation to food needs and were willing to continue to prepare and distribute food packages/ meals to individuals and families in need.</p> <p>These Community Food Providers are independent voluntary groups with a variety of governance structures. All the providers function in different ways with very little consistency in terms of delivery models, coverage, food sources and nutritional value and consistency of food provided.</p>

Some Community Food Providers cover small local settlements whereas others cover large areas across the region. Some have teams of over 80 volunteers along with an infrastructure of drivers. Others have less than 5.

The source of referrals to Community Food Providers have historically been via self-referral, referral from a GP or support service such as Social Work.

With the persistence of COVID-19, the challenge has been to work with local organisations to ensure that there is access to nutritious food across the region to anyone who is in need regardless of location or financial status. There has been an increasing level of need for access to nutritious food, delivered where required, accompanied by wider advice and support. This support has been provided in a range of ways as outlined below.

FareShare: FareShare in Dumfries and Galloway is one of the projects which is part of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan and over the last five years the number of organisations who have become members of this food sharing organisation which is managed by the national Move-On Project has increased to 15 who are based throughout the Region.

The total amount of food delivered by Fareshare to the 15 organisations supported from 1/1/20 - 8/12/20 is as follows:

- 210 tonnes of food delivered into Dumfries and Galloway.
- 500,010 meal portions.
- £750,015 value of stock delivered.

This volume of food delivered far exceeds the minimum amount which is guaranteed per year by Fareshare and is continuing to have an incredibly positive an impact on food poverty within Dumfries and Galloway. The contract with Fareshare for all of our Community Food Members together is for 85.68 tonnes per year and this had been exceeded by 123.32 tonnes by December 2020.

FareShare deliveries have been used to either distribute food surplus, supplement food parcels or for the food supplied to be used towards producing cooked/ready meals which are then passed on to those in need. Fareshare and all of the organisations supported reduce food waste on a huge scale and the also contribute towards reducing the carbon footprint of our Region.

At their meeting on 9 February 2021, Communities Committee agreed that the costs for the membership and delivery for the 15 organisations who are current members would be covered again from April 2021 – March 2022. A waiting list for additional organisations to join and become Community Food Members of Fareshare is maintained and as soon as Move On is able to increase the number of deliveries to our Region, we will add these new members to this project.

Food Items: In usual times, Community Food Providers draw their food provisions from a wide range of sources, some from supermarkets and private donations, others from FareShare and local and national fundraising. However, the availability of food during the COVID-19 period has been less reliable due to shortages at source and the increase demand.

Stock which was held by these organisations depleted incredibly quickly given the increase in need and demand. The fact that projects had direct and quick access to funds helped projects to purchase items from local shops and wholesalers to ensure there was a level of supply coming through to providers.

Food parcels distributed by the community food providers vary greatly. They can contain:

- enough food to feed a family for a week
- non-perishable, mainly dry or tinned goods to see an individual through, say, 3 days
- basic store-cupboard staples supplemented by some homemade soup, ready meals or fresh fruit, veg and meat from FareShare or local supermarket surplus
- pet food, household cleaning and personal hygiene products
- or just a few items to top up the family shop

There are also differing versions of 'sharing tables' where anyone can pick up some items nearing/ or just past their use by date that would otherwise end up in land fill.

Some providers do not deal with parcels at all but instead distribute homemade ready meals (either hot or frozen).

Meal Preparation - hot / pre prepared meals: As part of the grant conditions, all food providers are required to have awareness of their legal responsibilities under food safety legislation. This includes the storage and labelling of food, the suitability of their premises, training of staff and volunteers, allergen management and procedures and personal hygiene and Corona Virus. They are also committed to working towards zero waste, acting to minimise food waste and phase out the use of single use plastic/ polystyrene packaging, replacing this with environmentally sound alternatives. There is also an expectation that food will be sourced locally whenever possible.

Support was provided to lease equipment, purchase suitable containers and enabled some food sharing projects to use local hotels or cafes to support their efforts in providing meals, especially where there was a need for those most vulnerable to receive hot or prepared meals.

Moving into the winter months, Community Food Providers were acutely aware that food insecurity was highly likely to increase due to anticipated increased unemployment, continuation of the furlough scheme, rising bills, reintroduction of sanctions and the potential for local clusters and associated lockdowns.

Given that there is always potential for the impact of winter weather, the need to access food aid at a very local level so as to avoid difficulty in getting provisions to people was looked at and implemented using the most appropriate provider within any particular locality. Local approaches such as this have enabled us to work with a broader range of providers who are now offering very local supports in rural settlements which were harder to reach previously i.e. Isle Futures who feature in a case study later in the report.

In December 2020 providers were asked to accept referrals for hot/ prepared meals as a result of referrals coming through the Access Team at a time when school kitchens, our normal resource to address this, were closed. A number of Providers have provided this essential support in very challenging circumstances, including over holiday periods.

Transport and Support Costs: Funding to cover the costs of volunteers' insurance, travel expenses, training, personal protective equipment (PPE) and/or access to safely deliver food was covered.

Transport: Transport costs to deliver food parcels and prepared meals continues to be a challenge and a financial pressure for most Community Food Providers.

We know that for some individuals, particularly those previously shielding that there is anxiety about using public transport, getting to a supermarket once in town, queuing, shopping and then returning home. In some areas due to limited public transport this could take several hours. Feedback tells us that this has been a reason behind some of the requests received.

Health and Safety: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Given that COVID-19 is known to be an infectious respiratory disease it was imperative that we supported infection prevention and control measures including PPE for staff and volunteer use. Items included sanitiser, masks, aprons, gloves and signage. Initially, providers accessed this equipment themselves due to the difficulties in procuring large stocks. However, the Council have been able to procure and provide PPE directly to providers via our Solution Centre.

Health and Hygiene: To ensure that health and hygiene standards are met, organisations involved in food preparation and distribution were required to observe our Council's emergency response catering guide - Food Safety Advice for Community, Voluntary and Third Sector Groups.

Risk Assessment and Review: All organisations have a risk assessment in place to cover their operations which includes responding to the risks presented by COVID-19. Due to the identification of further strains which are thought to more contagious we are working with providers to access specialist advice and support.

Cleaning: Some organisations sought support from our Council's cleaning services to have access to specialist cleaning equipment or to have their premises cleaned in advance of the preparation and supply of food to members of the community. On-going cleaning regimes are in place for all providers as required as part of their food safety measures.

Volunteer Training: Providers have identified several training opportunities which will ensure that their volunteers continue to be able to provide support in the safest way possible. This includes basic health and safety, food and hygiene, risk assessment and the protection of vulnerable adults.

Data Collection: Data, including weekly performance information has helped both providers and the Community Support Group to understand need and demand, including the number of individuals and families benefitting, the number of volunteers involved, resources required in terms of time and the miles covered to reach those in need.

However, it has been challenging to understand the raw data provided by Community Food Providers as there is no standardised definition of a food parcel. What is delivered to the doorstep of people requiring a food parcel is, to some extent dependent on where they live and what the local food provider has, or can make, available at that time.

In partnership with Providers our data collection has been refined throughout the year to provide all partners with a more meaningful set of measures to allow a better representation of the nature and level of demand and provision, allowing us to better understand:

- The estimated total number of meals provided in the week (via food parcels and/ or prepared meals)
- the number of people benefitting from the food and, of those, how many were new/ first time beneficiaries
- the contribution volunteers and paid staff
- travel costs

An example of the level of volunteer effort that has “matched” the financial contribution invested is shown below based on data gathered from providers:

- Volunteer time = 30, 000 hours (19 weeks) = 41,053 (26 weeks)
- Costed @ Living Wage of £9.30 per hour = £381,790

Introducing Referral Pathways: To help reduce the need for emergency food provisions, it has been recognised that referral pathways are essential in supporting those who are facing an income crisis. In response, we have developed a model/pathway for referrals through a single point of contact for anyone who requires support.

Our Social Work Access Team has a central telephone line through which callers are triaged to identify the most appropriate support available e.g. crisis grant, emergency food, support with energy costs etc. The aim is to help those with financial worries to easily access advice and cash-based support which could help alleviate their situation.

The Scottish Government is promoting a ‘cash first’ approach to tackle food insecurity where people are able to access supplies safely, recognising that people need to be able to afford the essentials that they will need. This approach provides individuals and families with a greater level of dignity, respect as well choice.

Moving Forward: The activities of the food providers had not previously been coordinated on a regional basis. Through the development of the regional and local food networks we are supporting the transition of many of the local groups from providing emergency food aid as the primary response and to develop more dignified models which promote choice, participation and community development and support pathways out of crisis.

These new locality partnerships are proving successful in creating improved opportunities for Community Food Providers to work together, share resources, identify and respond to need or gaps in provision, avoid any duplication and plan for the future to the longer-term sustainability of food provision.

In order to build capacity and a broader understanding of Community Food Provider staff and volunteers have participated in training, webinars, research topics and built contacts and relationships with other local authority areas to identify and share good practice.

Case Studies

Case Study 1

Isle Futures – Hot Meal Provision

Isle Futures, a small charity organisation manages the Isle of Whithorn community hub, of St Ninian's Hall, tearoom and shop. Despite our tearoom and hall being closed due to the current restrictions, our kitchen is very much open and we are able to continue to supply meals to our community through the shop, in the form of meals to reheat and a takeaway service twice a week. As such, we were very keen to become part of the scheme to provide hot meals, via referral from social services, to people in our community and beyond, utilising our amazing volunteers to help deliver such a vital service to those more vulnerable people around us.

Individual A: was identified as such a person, living alone, just outside the village, suffering grief, loneliness and isolation and having no means of communication and no family around the individual was suffering.

Thankfully, individual A has two neighbours who discovered this and through working with social services via the Access Team referral system, Isle Futures are now providing this individual with a hot, home cooked meal 4 times a week at lunchtime. The individual has chosen to come and collect the meals himself, which gives him a purpose to get up and dressed and interact with other people.

So far the approach we have put in place has worked extremely well and everyone feels that the scheme has been of positive benefit to him. Last week he did not turn up for his meal. This flagged up an issue immediately so we were able to contact his neighbour who went to check on him. Unfortunately, he was having a significantly bad time with his depression, but his neighbours were able to come and collect his meals for him to ensure he was still being fed. This is an excellent example of a small community working together, with social services to ensure the health and wellbeing of

	vulnerable people within the community. We all feel that he will continue to benefit from this service and it has a positive impact on his physical and mental health.
Case Study 2	<p>The River of Life Food Project during Covid-19 When we first met Carol [name changed] she was very ill with the Covid-19 virus. Having been discharged from hospital she was referred to us as a person who was in need of help from our free food delivery service.</p> <p>Carol has always been very appreciative of our help & contact, as she lives alone with only her budgie for company. Over the months that we have known her, she has shared with us many personal details about her past including her many health issues & how she lost contact with her young family in the past.</p> <p>She has certainly taken us into her confidence & once lockdown restrictions were lifted she has visited us at the church in person for a 'coffee morning' on more than one occasion.</p> <p>She has also visited us at home & usually phones every day for a short chat, telling us about her day.</p> <p>Although she suffers from poor health we have seen her health improve over the months & she has a lot more energy than when we first met her.</p> <p>When we first met Carol we assumed she was between 60-70 years of age. We now know her poor health had a negative effect on how she looked. She now looks more like her true age of 46.</p> <p>Her outlook is now much better. She is trying to give up smoking & is looking forward to soon moving to another house where she doesn't have to live in the negative atmosphere of her present location.</p> <p>Carol has said on more than one occasion that she doesn't know how she would have coped without our help & support & we feel she will probably need to rely on our help for quite a while to come. She doesn't yet have the energy or strength to carry shopping home & doesn't have the internet to shop online.</p> <p>The change in Carol over the past few months has been very positive & we now consider her our friend.</p>
Case Study 3	<p>Heart of Galloway Recipient 1: We are isolating and really struggling for money. The food bank has brought us peace of mind. Without it we would have starved, and I am not exaggerating. I was apprehensive about asking for help as I felt that others were in more desperate need than us, but I read about you and the people have been so kind and helpful. It's the best thing you could've done for us at this time. You have offered us a helping hand. We would not have eaten without you.</p>

	<p>Recipient 2: It's been an absolute life saver! I don't have any relatives near here and I haven't been able to leave the house for over 20 weeks. I wouldn't have been able to get any food. I just don't know what I would have done. The delivery people have been wonderful. I would have had nothing. I can't thank you enough.</p> <p>Recipient 3: It's the hardest thing I've ever done, making this call. I've always worked and had money, but I've lost my job, I've used all my savings and I really don't know how I'm going to feed my kids this week. Am I allowed to get something, just for the kids? I can manage. Thank you so much (tears). I can breathe again.</p> <p>Volunteer 1: I'll be honest, I found the early days shocking. I remember a young woman coming to the door of the food bank. She kind of hid at the door, really embarrassed and she told me she didn't want to be here. She had 3 kids and nothing. That's when I realised, this is for real. I also had a neighbour of mine attend and it stuck with me for days. There is need in the town. People are really struggling. This needs to carry on as I feel that we are still not getting to some of the people who need us. I'm glad the food bank is carrying on and we need to keep promoting it as I now realise there are many more people who need our help. It costs me nothing to help, but it has really shown me what is needed in our town.</p>
Case Study 4	<p>Upper Nithsdale Family Support Services - Action for Children</p> <p>Family 1: We support a mum and her two son's, aged 7 yrs and 14 yrs, this family were referred to the service after mum and dad's relationship broke down and dad left the area with no means of the family contacting him. Mum discovered that dad had left the family in a considerable amount of debt and mum was really struggling in all areas of family life. Whilst supporting the family the Family Support Practitioner identified that the family would benefit from the home-cooked meal and basic household item service that we offer. Each week both boys are excitedly waiting on their two-course home-cooked meal that they and their mum receive along with the basic household items. Having this service has reduced more financial pressure on this family and allowed the family to have breathing space from their worries and anxieties. The family report that on these delivery days they all eat together and the youngest boy is especially excited about that experience. Mum is working with Citizen Advice on sorting out the debt she was left with and has a financial budget plan.</p> <p>Family 2: We supported a family who due to possible Covid symptoms had to self-isolate. Unfortunately, both parents work at the local meat factory and received only statutory sick pay during their self-isolation. This was extremely difficult for a family of four to manage running their household on a very low income during the 14 days. We were able to support the family through this time with the home-cooked evening meals and basic household items. We were also able to apply for Emergency Funding due to Covid to ensure their rent, council tax, gas and electric were all paid.</p>
Case Study 5	Lochside Community Association

	<p>Recipient A: We've been living in a never-ending nightmare. Prior to the pandemic my partner decided to go self-employed and work alongside their cousin with their new business. The Covid-19 pandemic struck and we were in lockdown with four children under 8. As the business was new and my partner was not within their first-year tax return we were not entitled to any financial assistance. We live in a private let with the rent eating up most of our monthly household income. We were not entitled any to assistance with our rent. Our income was virtually mere pennies over being entitled to any help with school meals and everything that could possibly go wrong or break seems to have done so during this time. Initially, we considered ourselves lucky because the new business had already earned some really loyal customers who tried to give my partner and their cousin odd jobs throughout the pandemic to keep the wolf away from the door. The truth of the matter is that the fact my partner had no choice but to go out the door to carry on working was terrifying. We were in lockdown whilst my partner was leaving the house to do odd jobs to not even bring much money home. At times we had very little to feed the children or disposable income to afford essentials such as gas and electric. Often these would run out. Grub Club and the FareShare parcels available at Lochside Community Centre have virtually saved our lives. It makes me feel so ashamed as a mother and I really thought that I did not deserve to have such beautiful and amazing children because I have listened to my children be upset and crying because they have been hungry and cold. It has been heart breaking.</p> <p>Recipient B: Things have been very difficult for me. I struggle a lot with my mental health and have battled on and off for many years with addiction. My relationship with my partner and family has broken down and I lost my job. I had to apply for Universal Credit during the pandemic. I have not always been a perfect human but I have always been a grafter. I always used to think I could survive anything so long as I had my job to keep me going. Having a job means that I have some pride. Universal Credit is a cruel system. I don't know how they expect people to stay alive with nothing maybe that is the point. They want us to give up, go away and die. I don't know Lochside very well but somebody told me to go some shop with free stuff as they're all local people that care about the community and I'd be able to get help. I did, man it took a lot for me to go to their door. I was told that because my name wasn't on a list so I couldn't receive any help. I sat on the wall outside the shop and just broke down crying. A passer-by stopped to ask what was wrong and then told me to get myself along to the community centre in Lochside. I am glad I did as I finally got somebody to just listen to me and help me out – I got some food to eat there and then. I hadn't eaten for days. I'm not a beggar but was practically reduced to beg for help.</p>
Case Study 6	<p>Fed-Up Café The Fed-Up Café provided over 12,000 meals during the pandemic up to the 6 August 2020 and still carry on providing meals to those in need.</p> <p>At the beginning of the pandemic, we had to completely change the structure of the café and form a partnership with the Re-use shop to cater for 200 people providing a take-away meal and delivering service during this time. One of the</p>

	<p>service users came under the shielding organisation group and unfortunately, she was unable to leave her home due to the guideline restrictions for her age group.</p> <p>During this time, she commented on the fact that she always looked forward to seeing the delivery team as she was feeling isolated and lonely due to the government guide lines and restrictions. along with knowing that there was someone there to provide any service when needed. Also, she felt that providing a meal for her everyday cut down on the weekly cost of food, enabling her to direct her finances in other directions.</p> <p>Whilst the team delivered a meal, they made sure they greeted everyone with a friendly smile and a routine check of how they were. Additional to this they would regularly leave extra cakes or biscuits as a surprise to the people whilst delivering a meal.</p> <p>This particular case study featured on the Border TV news, week commencing the 22 June 2020.</p>
Case Study 7	<p>First Base</p> <p>A volunteers' story: When X retired in 2010 after many years working for the Unite Union, he became a First Volunteer for five years until deciding to completely retire when he turned 65. As soon as the pandemic arrived he leapt out of retirement and was determined to do anything he could to help. He volunteered to help out at the hospital. He also re-volunteered for us. He asked what could he do? We told him we had kept a stock of emergency food parcels in Thornhill Library for many years. The library was now closed as part of the lockdown. We had never seen huge demand – about 5 parcels per month. Maybe demand in the village would rise? And if it did indeed rise, then the only way we could cover the demand would be to deliver from Dumfries. How would he feel about making the deliveries? Well in typical fashion X went many steps further. He found premises, secured a team of volunteers and opened up a satellite operation for us in Thornhill.</p> <p>The Thornhill Community Food Initiative now helps over thirty people a week with emergency food – a 2400% increase on pre pandemic levels. The Thornhill operation receives amazingly generous donations of food and cash and it is very much rooted in the local community. Sadly, X is no longer with us – he suffered a massive heart attack whilst collecting provisions. He has left an enduring legacy and clear proof of what a single dedicated individual can achieve in times of need. X is sadly missed.</p>

Category 2 – Connectivity

Background

There have been various mechanisms through which digital connectivity and inclusion have been delivered in our region since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The opportunity to support individuals and families has highlighted the high demand for, and gaps, in access to digital devices and connectivity, and the disadvantage experienced by those not digitally connected.

A report commissioned by (TSDG) also in October 2020 studied the needs of people and groups in the region, highlighting the significant number of individuals in the region with little or no online access and the potential and available sources of funding to address need. The main recommendation for the way forward was that a “coordinated approach is taken on a regional basis to accelerate the impact and ensure all groups requiring digital inclusion are catered for. This should provide the vehicle and continuum to link national policy and programmes, through region-wide activities, to local application and action.”

Connecting D&G.

Through the Connecting D&G project provision has been provided to families & individuals considered vulnerable. Vulnerabilities include those in temporary accommodation or at risk of homelessness, clients who are clinically at risk, and others identified as digitally excluded through low incomes, isolation and lack of internet access. Providing devices, connectivity and support to get connected has ensured that individuals have been enabled to maintain tenancies, keep their Universal Credit Cas File updated, keep in touch with health professionals and support services and are benefiting from being able to keep in contact with their families and support networks during the on-going Covid 19 Pandemic.

Scottish Government Connecting Scotland Programme (originally named the Get Online Initiative)

Connecting Scotland is a Scottish Government programme set up in response to coronavirus. Organisations and partners based in our communities are invited to apply for the provision of iPads Chromebooks and connectivity for citizens and service users. They are also encouraged to offer support to develop digital skills. The programme is targeted to people who are all of the following:

- digitally excluded – do not have an appropriate device and/or are not connected to the internet at home;
- on low incomes so cannot afford to buy a device or pay for internet access;
- at risk of isolation due to coronavirus because they are in the extremely high vulnerability group or the higher risk of severe illness

group.

Getting online has helped individuals and families access the services and support they need. It also helps them to keep in contact with their friends and family. Applications are assessed by SCVO and local authorities. Awards have been made from the [allocation of devices](#) per local authority area. information on how to apply for the next phase and guidance can be found on the Support DG website: [Connecting Scotland](#)

Case Studies

Case Study 1	<p>Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership (DGHP) Provision of Mobile Device for Homeless Person: <u>Individual 1</u>: Lives in temporary supported homeless accommodation and requires intensive support for his mental health. He had broken his phone and had no way of keeping in contact with his DGHP worker or counsellor who he was having regular calls with.</p> <p>The project enabled DGHP to issue him with a tablet which he could use to keep in contact with all his professional services.</p> <p>He was able to continue his intensive support for his mental health and as a result has coped fantastically well throughout lockdown, meaning that he is in a better place to be able to move on to his own permanent tenancy when the time comes. He was also able to keep in touch with his parents who are a huge support to him.</p>
Case Study 2	<p>Provision of Mobile Phone and Wi-Fi to clients in temporary accommodation Housing Support Provider - Independent Living Support (ILS)) <u>Service User X</u>: Is 18 years old, they were struggling financially every month due to low Universal Credit payments. They could not access internet at home as could not afford it and during lock-down all libraries and communal facilities were closed due to Covid-19. Service user X felt isolated and struggled with their mental health.</p> <p>Once service user X was given a mobile device, they accessed social media and could communicate with family and</p>

	<p>friend, making them less socially isolated. Service user X also worked on their CV, could access their emails, and actively investigated local employment/training opportunities. Service user X was able to email a vacancy that was advertised with Shax, enabling them to apply appropriately.</p> <p>Service user X is happier, more relaxed and feels part of the world and much less isolated, which has improved their mental health. Service user X is also managing better financially.</p>
Case Studies 3 and 4	<p>Provision of Mobile Phone and Wi-Fi to clients in temporary accommodation Housing Support Provider - Annanbank (S & A Homes Housing Support Services Limited)</p> <p><u>Service User X</u>: X has limited contact with their children and must attend Social Work/Children’s Panel meetings regularly. X had a very old mobile phone with none of the facilities needed to maintain contact with their children or to “attend” online meetings.</p> <p>X requires basic housing support and signposting for more specialist needs. Referring X for one of the devices was intended to allow them to improve contact with their children and to take a full part in on-line meetings which will decide the future relationship with their family.</p> <p>The device has enabled X to have more regular contact with the children and to take part in social work and Children’s Panel meetings.</p> <p><u>Service User Y</u>: Y had been studying in Glasgow but had to give up their course when they lost their accommodation due to Covid 19. Y’s family lives in this area so they returned here but had to make a homeless person’s application. Y is ex forces and has children living in the South of England with an ex-partner. Y was referred for one of the devices so that they would be able to improve contact with their children during the pandemic.</p> <p>Because of his situation Y had been experiencing depression. Being able to keep up regular contact with their children has helped their mental health considerably as has decent and stable private let accommodation now secured.</p>
Case Studies 5 and 6	<p>Provision of Mobile Phone and Wi-Fi to clients in temporary accommodation Housing Support Provider – Shelter Scotland</p> <p><u>Service User X</u>: X is homeless and living in temporary accommodation. X has no access to public funds, no job, no phone or computer / access to internet and has no savings. X was provided with a device and can now apply for jobs online and makes contact with employers possible by phone and email as well as to access other vital services. Food</p>

	<p>banks are now able to contact X when delivering food parcels. The device serves as a tool to search for a job, which is a main goal for X client and has regained hope in future.</p> <p><u>Service User Y:</u> Y is homeless and is housed temporary accommodation nine miles from nearest town in a village where they did not know anyone and had no support from family or friends. Y was feeling very isolated and highly anxious and had no money until receiving their first Universal Credit payment.</p> <p>Y found lockdown very distressing because of social distancing, restrictions on travel and reduced public transport and support services were unable to do home visits so all support had to be done via phone and text and Y had no device.</p> <p>Y was given a mobile device and has advised that this has been ‘absolutely brilliant!’. Having the device has enabled Y to keep their UC claim up to date and message the Jobcentre advisor, Y has been able to keep in touch with family and friends via email and social media, follow the news, watch You-Tube, occasionally treat himself to watching a movie and use it to look at college courses, availability of RSL tenancies on their websites etc. It has also enabled Y to make calls and send texts.</p> <p>Y has advised that having the device has helped them to cope better with their situation, helped them to relieve boredom and to a certain extent, helped manage their anxiety. It has helped Y to feel less socially isolated, more settled, and more positive about the future despite being worried about when and where they will be allocated a tenancy. It has enabled Y to have some control over the benefit claim, therefore helping with his budgeting.</p>
Case Studies 7 and 8	<p>Provision of Mobile Phone and Wi-Fi to clients in temporary accommodation Housing Support Provider – Wigtownshire Women’s Aid</p> <p><u>Service User X:</u> X was living in homeless accommodation with a young daughter. X only had pay as you go access to the internet while in the accommodation and spent much of the time visiting family and friends. When the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a national lockdown X was very anxious about how they would manage. There was no internet package or access to data in the property.</p> <p>X feel they would have struggled to get through the lockdown period without the additional help in the form of the tablet. X shared that their mental health would have been greatly impacted as worried a lot at the best of times so having access to support meant they had reassurance and guidance at the other end of the phone throughout.</p>

	<p>The project has helped X by giving access to the internet which has allowed them to keep in touch with family and friends and services at a vulnerable time in their life. X has been able to keep the daughter more entertained when outside activities were restricted too. It has eased the financial pressure on X worrying about topping up the phone to keep in touch. X has also been able to keep in touch with services such as Job Centre to apply for Universal Credit. X has been able to track their housing by keeping in touch with DGHP. The project has also allowed X to keep in touch with their support worker for emotional and practical support during this time and has managed to keep in regular contact with the health visitor for the daughter.</p> <p><u>Service User Y</u>: Y came to stay at the refuge after fleeing domestic violence from their partner and was on a limited income of ESA.</p> <p>Y owned a basic phone that was outdated and very temperamental which meant that the service providers could not get hold of them. During lock down this was very frustrating for both Y and service provider as staff were working from home and at times could not contact Y to provide our usual support.</p> <p>Once Y received the mobile phone, we were able to use WhatsApp to see and speak with them effectively.</p> <p>Y also has 2 sons who live out with the area and normally was able to visit them every weekend but during lock down, this was not allowed. Having the mobile phone meant that Y could see and communicate with them through social media and have daily contact.</p>
Case Studies	<p>Connecting Scotland and Connecting D & G Project Examples of the positive impact</p> <p>Individual 1: 73 year-old man, registered blind has been receiving regular training sessions from his designated volunteer and is gaining more confidence when using the device and now makes regular contact with family in Glasgow, Ireland and London.</p> <p>Individual 2: Three year-old girl who is non-verbal, is able to communicate with mum through the device</p> <p>Family 1: Teenage mum in foster care who was isolated with a new baby has been able to do online learning and explore college courses for next year. It is also helped her be able to look up things about baby development and link into on-line forums with other young mums.</p>

<p>Family 2: Kinship family where gran has had a stroke and struggles to communicate verbally. They live in an isolated spot with poor public transport and having the laptop has helped keep in touch with family, do on-line shopping, homework and keep in touch with professionals.</p>

Category 3 – Advice and Support

Background

This element of funding was made available for community organisations to produce Information in different languages and formats – this could be audio, large print etc for people with sensory impairments; easy read for those with Additional Support Needs; and in different languages. It also supported people into private let tenancies through the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme.

DGVOICE – Languages £2,500: The Phase 3 funding allocation supported DG Voice to provide ‘Accessible and Easy Read formats Training and information’ these included: Support with easy read documents and website which included: • Checking and support for documents produced in house • Support to set up a reader panel to check easy read work produced in house • Additional training session to plan how easy read could be produced within the organisation and a year’s subscription to Photosymbols providing a bank of images suitable for use in easy read materials. They will also deliver ‘Easy read training’.

Dumfries and Galloway Multicultural Association (DGMA) – Languages £2,500: The Phase 3 funding allocation supported Dumfries and Galloway Multi Cultural Association to provided 28 volunteers to deliver Information in 20 different languages and in a multitude of formats, from easy read for those with Additional Support Needs; and languages needs including: Chinese Mandarin, Cantonese, Polish, French, Turkish, Bulgarian, Bengali, Russian, Arabic, Algerian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Hindi, Urdu, Lithuanian, Spanish, Italian, Swahili and Pilipino.

DGMA Staff and volunteers responded to 239 requests for support with enquiries covering: universal credit systems, form filling, CV building, scanning and printing documents. They were also report being able to respond to over 1000 online enquiries via their social media platforms.

DGMA stated that as a direct result of the Hardship fund award, they were subsequently able to build their knowledge and information through research and translation to pass it to the communities. They were also able to apply to other funds as well i.e. £7,000 COVID Emergency Payments to individual and families within Black, Asian Cultural Ethnic Communities, and ‘Cash for Kids’ for 40 children in difficult circumstances.

DGMA provided several in-depth case studies on individuals and families who each benefited from the support provided through this enabling fund.

The Hub Dumfries - Rent Deposit Scheme £5,000: During Covid-19 this fund has enabled The Hub to continue to source private rented sector tenancies for people in housing need who were left in limbo as social housing landlords and many lettings' agents temporarily ceased operations during lockdown. This despite Scottish Government guidance that lettings could go ahead where there was an urgent housing need. The Phase 3 funding allocation supported The Hub D&G to provide additional financial support for residents on low wage or those on benefits, to assist them to obtain or maintain a private sector tenancy and was managed by The Hub, Dumfries, who had delivered a similar scheme prior to the Covid 19 Pandemic. The fund has supported Rent in Advance payments to be made to landlords as well as the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme Deposit Bond at date of entry. For many people on low incomes this requirement is a barrier to being able to access private rented sector tenancies. The Hub were able to provide and underwrite Rent in Advance loans in partnership with Solway Credit Union. As these loans get paid back over time this will become a "recycle" fund able to continue to assist people. This partnership approach has also encouraged people to join the Solway Credit Union and hopefully over time become savers or able to access affordable credit.

The Hub have also been able to maintain and further develop our relationship with private sector rented landlords who were keen to work with us during this period. We are hoping this will pay dividends going forward through landlords approaching us direct when they have properties to let and be more amenable to letting their properties to those on low incomes and/or on benefits.

During the delivery of this first phase of funding, this project was able to complete the following:

- Number of new Rent Deposit Scheme referrals - 22 households (45 people including 14 children under 16yrs)
- Number of Rent Deposit referrals still needing to identify a tenancy - 11
- Number of new Tenancies Secured through Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme – 11

From the allocation of phase three funding The Hub D&G were enabled to provide additional funding for residents on low wage or those on benefits to assist them in obtaining or maintaining a private sector tenancy:

- Two volunteers were able to support 12 households consisting of (29 beneficiaries including 12 children under 16 years of age).

This Project is managed by the paid Staff Team at The Hub – due to the Covid 19 Pandemic Restrictions, working with volunteers is on hold with this project.

Case Studies

Case Study	<p>Dumfries and Galloway Multicultural Association (DGMA)</p> <p>Case Study 1: Mr and Mrs A, a Polish couple who have lived in UK for 16 years.</p> <p>Mr A has been a truck-driver here, and Mrs A was a cleaner. Due to his health conditions, Mr A, fell into the category of a 'shielded person' during the Covid-19 lock-down his work was suspended, therefore he received sick pay of only £90 per week.</p> <p>Mrs A also lost her job during the lock-down and had to apply for Universal Credit. Later Mr A received a letter informing him that he was to be made redundant.</p> <p>Because of their financial hardships, Mr and Mrs A, had difficulty paying their expenditures, including rent for accommodation, rent arrears from the past which they were paying off, electricity bills, and fuel costs for their car and household repair costs.</p> <p>They turned to DGMA for help and advice.</p> <p>DGMA supplied them with essential foodstuffs on most weeks during lock-down, and DGMA staff helped them with translation of communications to Council departments and other offices, providing much-needed information on where to turn for help, what benefits and other assistance to apply for, and assisted them with making (online) applications.</p> <p>DGMA Case Study 2: J from East Asia</p> <p>J is a divorced single mother with two. The aftereffects of her marital situation left her with mental health issues, including depression.</p> <p>J was invited to help DGMA by translating and interpreting important financial, informal, and other texts, (both written and spoken) for many of DGMA's clients.</p> <p>Through these services, J was able to gain self-respect and feel useful. She came out of her 'comfort zone' and reached out to many people from her own cultural background who faced similar challenges to her own, she is now taking on the more responsible tasks of translating DGMA'S Covid-19 updates and WhatsApp communications.</p>
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	<p>J has been encouraged by DGMA to attend training in which she was able to share more about her experiences and help other women to feel comfortable about speaking out and relating their stories of personal problems and difficulties. She has contacted over 30 women so far who are struggling in various ways, thereby helping them to reduce their sense of loneliness and social isolation. Her inner strength and courage were an example to these women to overcome their own fears.</p> <p>Thanks to her involvement, DGMA has helped over 30 families with cash for their children's needs and identified 20 women who have benefitted from help in the form of £20 top-up payments each, to assist with their need for adequate heating.</p>
Case Study	<p>The Hub Dumfries</p> <p>Individual A: A has Asperger's and OCD and was living in a House of Multiple Occupation sharing bathroom and kitchen facilities which was having a detrimental impact on their mental health. The Hub managed to identify a self-contained flat that was close to both their support networks and their part-time therapeutic work at a local supermarket. The Hub were able to secure this flat with both a rent in advance payment and the rent deposit guarantee bond in lieu of a cash deposit. Without this A health and wellbeing would have deteriorated and his ability to live independently put at risk.</p>

Category 4 – Energy

Background
<p>Homes and Energy The Hub - Winter Warmth for Older People Scheme - £5,000 (Phase 1 fund)</p> <p>This project was developed to provide additional support for people over 60 years of age who are not in paid work, receiving Benefits or have extenuating circumstances to access traditional fuels and get advice and support for fuel debt write offs.</p> <p>This would normally be collected, cut and delivered in bulk loads by The Hub Project partners on this scheme Dumfries and Galloway Council's Community Payback Team but due to the on-going Covid 19 Pandemic, this was not possible to be completed this year. The Hub developed a new way of supporting those in most need by utilising all the available funding for this project to purchase Briquettes and Kindling Wood from the Wood Fuel Cooperative which was then delivered in bulk to each of the households. This fuel is different to</p>

the normal method which has traditionally been logs which have been cut and prepared from fallen trees by the Community Payback Team.

Each year, the Hub offer this free Service for residents to register for and their staff and volunteers would normally assist them to complete the online Registration and Order Form. The Project is well advertised through regional networks and the aim every year is to increase the overall number of households supported via this project, especially those which are harder to reach than others. The feedback received from those supported with the alternative fuels this year has been very positive with a number commenting that the briquettes supplied have actually been easier to handle and fuel their fires with than the larger traditional logs. The Hub may adapt future years projects to include a mixture of both types of fuel with the choice being made by each household on which they would prefer to receive free of charge.

In addition to all of the above, The Hub also helped every household by signposting them to additional support mechanisms for winter payments including all Scottish and UK Government Warm Winter Payments and any additional benefits. In total, 187 Households throughout our region have benefitted from this grant funding award.

During Covid-19, this funding has enabled The Hub to continue this project which would otherwise not have been available to the 187 additional households supported by this grant award of £5,000.00. This has made a tremendous difference to every single household supported in terms of reducing their costs which they would have incurred by purchasing winter fuel to heat their households. The savings made to each household has enabled them to purchase other essentials such as food and to pay for electricity supplies.

Without this funding, each and every one of these households would have been struggling to heat their homes or would have done without heat which in the current very cold months which we have experienced would have resulted in cases of hypothermia and for some of older residents potentially death through the lack of heat in their homes. This project literally saves lives each and every winter.

The Hub Dumfries Winter Warmth for Older People Scheme - £10,000 (Phase 3 fund) with an additional award of £5,315 for Fuel Oil and Coal Support issued February 2021

The funding was used by The Hub D&G to provide free kindling and briquettes to 275 households (426 elderly beneficiaries) who use open fires for heating. Most of the work required in identifying the household need was carried out by four volunteers:

The funding also enabled The Hub D&G to identify other support needs required and to make referrals to their various project partners to provide support interventions.

- 93 households were referred to Fire and Rescue Service for home safety checks (i.e. smoke/carbon monoxide alarms)

- 12 households were assisted to obtain best value fuel tariffs and fuel debt write offs
- 17 households were referred for an income maximisation assessment
- 63 households were referred for an insulation and energy efficient heating installation assessment

In addition to the Winter Warmth programme, The Hub have agreed to trial supported payments for residents of properties with Oil fuel heating. On completion, the results of the work currently being delivered by The Hub will feed into the councils Anti-Poverty group.

- Oil/LPG subsidy has supported 22 households so far at a cost of £2,640

Additional top up of Energy Cards – Registered Social Landlords within Dumfries and Galloway - £50,000

This project was developed to provide additional payments to people who are in debt and cannot make the repayments, on Benefits or just above the threshold or are at risk of being cut off. Each of the RSL's within our region were contacted to offer this funding for the delivery of this project to their tenants with additional support provided by the Anti-Poverty Officer to both develop and assist with the delivery of the project.

The allocations of funding to each of the housing providers involved was calculated based on the number of properties which each of the RSL's held within our region.

Each of the allocations and the results are all highlighted below:

DGHP / Wheatley Group Total fund allocation from Phase 1 & 3 combined = £60,170.00
Phase 1 - Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership - £37,250

DGHP was the first organisation to deliver this project and early on identified the additional capacity which this would require for their officers to support their tenants at the time of the initial Covid 19 Pandemic. Through discussions with the Anti-Poverty Officer and the development of a new delivery mechanism, Auriga Services was appointed to assist with the successful delivery of the project.

Auriga work directly with the utility providers and issue a voucher code directly to the tenants mobile phone which they can then go with the code to the outlet of their choice and top up their meters. There is a very small charge for each of the vouchers issued and due to the fact that a large number of tenants would be utilising this service, it was agreed that Auriga Services would be used to make the whole process much more efficient for both the tenants and for the DGHP Officers.

In total 234 tenants have been supported by this project from May 2020 onwards with 122 of this amount saved from having their gas and electricity supplies cut off. This would have resulted in no heating, hot water, cooking facilities and lighting within their homes which together with the on-going effects of the Covid 19 Pandemic would have resulted in a severe impact to their already damaged mental health.

Phase 3 - DGHP / The Wheatley Group (RSL) - £22,920 fund allocation operated between 22nd December 2020 to 19th February 2021 enabling DGHP Officers to support:

- 442 Households Regionwide
- 589 Adults
- 272 Children

Energy Funding allocation by Postcode area to DGHP Tenants

Postcode	08/01/2021	15/01/2021	22/01/2021	29/01/2021	05/02/2021	12/02/2021	19/02/2021	Grand Total
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
DG1	150	470	260	580	390	780	450	3080.00
DG2	529	1349	1260	1448	918	1159	1340	8003.00
DG3	200	80	60	-	-	400	-	740.00
DG4	140	360	420	540	-	310	80	1850.00
DG5	-	-	300	-	220	240	80	840.00
DG6	-	150	50	80	210	-	160	650.00

DG7	20	350	400	260	170	50	390	1640.00
DG8	220	150		220	370	660	610	2230.00
DG9	260	750	920	850	1420	1150	1300	6650.00
DG10	50	340	60	190	90	240	110	1080.00
DG11	160	240	560	140	560	570	140	2370.00
DG12	170	340	340	780	580	270	500	2980.00
DG13	110	-	-	80	150	60	60	460.00
DG16	80	330	-	-	200	90	160	860.00
Grand Total	2089	4909	4630	5168	5278	5979	5380	33433.00

The Award was made to Irvine Housing Association – providing additional payments to people who found themselves in debt and unable to make the repayments; claiming benefits or just above the threshold or, at risk of being cut off.

Phase 1 and Phase 3 - Irvine Housing Association (IHA) allocated a total of £2,325 to support tenants.

IHA reported between the 05th of January and 26th February 2021 they supported:

- 9 Household in the DG2 area / Ward 6
- 11 adults
- 4 children

IHA further reported:

- Assisting a householder to apply to SSAFA as tenant recently lost their job and found themselves in high arrears.
- Assisting with SP Hardship Fund application & advised re Scottish Child Payment and how to apply.

- Several tenants were provided with Food parcels. And received advice on benevolent funds from the housing officer.
- The support delivered through IHA's housing officer team continues to address tenants in need.
- Irvine Housing secured additional last-minute funding from SFHA for fuel assistance for all of our tenants. This funding had to be used within the next 4/5 weeks

Phase 1 - Loreburn Housing Association - £8,725.00

The delivery of this project was slightly delayed due to the impact of Covid 19 on the number of officers and staff members who were able to assist with the development and delivery of the project and it therefore started slightly later than the DGHP Project.

The same delivery mechanism was following through the support of Auriga Services which completed the DGHP Project, and the following number of tenants have been supported to date by this project.

Loreburn HA are still distributing payments to their tenants from the Phase 1 fund allocation and as yet have not provided a report to their monitoring officer.

Loreburn Housing Association chose not to receive with phase 3.

Case Studies

Case Study

Phase 3 - Winter Warmth for Older People Scheme - The Hub, Dumfries

One recipient of the support said: "Thank you so much. The kindling and briquettes have helped us as we were struggling with Scottish Power bills as our electric went up from £77 to £140 per month using our storage heaters to keep warm"

Energy Cards – Registered Social Landlords and Private Tenancies

Phase 3 - DGHP Tenant 1: Just moved to the area, from England. It was just before Christmas after a long and stressful year, the financial support allowed them to prioritise other bills and ensured that they had electricity over Christmas which was something they had considered not topping up. The support helped them to have a warm and safe Christmas in their new home. The tenant commented that they were amazed their landlord ran such a scheme as where they had lived in England, they wouldn't have dreamed of giving folk money for fuel bills.

Phase 3 - DGHP Tenant 2: Miss E said “she had never been in a climate like this before, and that she had been financially impacted greatly by the pandemic. Miss E made a simple phone call to her Housing Officer and it felt like a weight had been lifted. It is a great lifeline for those who are financially stuck and feel like there is nowhere else to turn. Customer thinks it is amazing that we (DGHP) can provide this support in present climate. She has been able to heat her home and make sure her children were warm and comfortable during the Winter period. And now Miss E is feeling more positive about her situation and knows to contact Housing Officer for additional assistance going forward”.

Phase 3 – DGHP Individual Tenant feedback to DGHP Housing officers on the support delivered through the energy fund:

- Helpful, helped me out of a hole.
- Yeah, helped us loads. It's brilliant
- Couldn't get by without it, just so grateful that DGHP have been so helpful.
- Helped me massively
- Its guid, got me out of a dark place, for when you're really stuck.
- Helped big time, managed to budget and topped up again
- It's good to know that this is an option, a great help.

Category 5 – Community Resilience

Background

In March 2020, a piece of work was undertaken by officers from within the Community Support Cell to identify the needs of the many existing community resilience teams that were already in place at that time; and to further engage with them to ensure that their existing plans were evolved enough to allow them to support their communities during the Covid-19 response; and to enable them to respond to the restrictions imposed upon us as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, both then and in the months that lay ahead.

The exercise identified that there were a number of communities across our region that did not have either an up to date or in some cases no resilience plan in place. Although, as quickly as the pandemic was taking hold some new groups started to come forward to offer help

and support. It was at that point and to offer a safe framework, a Quick Start Community Resilience Plan (Covid-19 specific) was developed that focussed specifically on activities linked to the coronavirus response. The plan was simple and easy to complete and helped to ensure that all community resilience teams were working within a consistent framework.

The plans provided a consistent framework of support and communication between our Council and those communities involving input from third sector partners and other agencies. More importantly, it helped to provide reassurance to those living and volunteering in local communities.

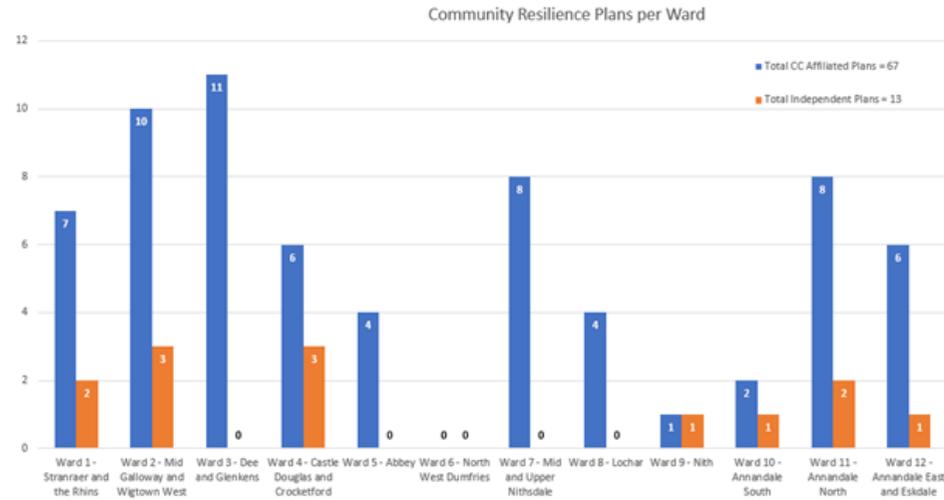
During the summer of 2020, the focus started to shift towards the Restart, Renew and Recovery of our communities. This provided a further opportunity to standardise all pre-existing community resilience plans and to build in the learning from the Covid-19 specific plans. A total of 80 community resilience teams are now signed up to the new standardised plan, supported by 834 volunteers from across the region. The revised plans provide communities with a consistent framework when responding to any emergency including winter resilience activities.

The Community resilience response has been vast and varied, the support being delivered to communities across our region by local community resilience teams and volunteers, has and continues to include shopping, meal provision, working with pharmacies in delivering prescriptions, dog walking, mental health support through telephone calls and wellbeing checks to ensure that members of the community are keeping safe and well and to prevent loneliness and isolation.

Building upon the learning and feedback received during the course of the pandemic, a robust training plan is being developed to include support for the use of technology and online communications; legislation and public protection; health and safety as well as a greater overall awareness of resilience.

Table 1 below provides a list by Ward of all Community Resilience Teams.

Table 1: Community Resilience Teams per Ward



Case Studies

Case Study 1

Closeburn Community Resilience Team



A world before Covid-19: Closeburn CRT established in February 2019 and quickly set-up a Facebook page to share CR information and to seek useful community equipment such as 4x4s and chainsaws with licensed chainsaw operators that could be used in an emergency event. A plea to local business was also made asking if they would provide equipment on loan. The Group began with no resilience equipment but following a micro grant from Closeburn Community Council and a donation from a local business they were able to purchase resilience equipment.

COVID-19 Response: As COVID-19 took hold and the first lockdown was announced, Closeburn CRT introduced “postcard help” offering assistance with shopping, delivering fuel (coal & logs), friendly phone calls and providing the name of a local volunteer and contact details so everyone had a volunteer to contact if in need.

An appeal was made for donations of extra items people might have in their cupboards to distribute between those who were running short which proved worthwhile and many items were received including anti-bacterial items and the much sought-after flour.

Activity bags which included colouring sheets, pencils, and craft items were provided for young people in the community as well as an easter egg. Packs containing crossword and puzzle books, recipes and nostalgic sweets were distributed to the older and more vulnerable residents.

Lockdown competitions were run by the CR team including Sunflower Competition, Melon Growing, Halloween Decoration, Painted Stone Snake and Garden Competition.

Once restrictions were lifted slightly the team organised doorstep Bingo, Disco's etc to boost mental health and it was a great way to get people exercising while having a good time. Weather permitting an outdoor library was set up. As winter approached and weather did not allow outdoor activities Zoom Bingo and a Zoom Coffee Morning was organised. A Minecraft Design competition is being planned for the young people.



Christmas saw the team organise a Santa Surprise Santa and Mrs Clause delivered a gift to every household (over 330) in the Closeburn Community Council area, this was welcomed by many and brought some much-needed Christmas Cheer!!

A quote from the Resilience Team Coordinator “we have just been trying to keep everyone's spirits up and ensuring everyone had someone to turn to if needed and everyone helped each other as a community, also trying to keep people focused on fun things or something to make them smile”

The team continue to support the Community with practical help including gritting but are also keeping a focus on COVID-19 and the communities mental health needs. Discussions are well underway for an Easter Event which would, of course, adhere to the latest guidelines.

Case Study 2

Cree Valley Community Resilience Team

COVID-19 Response: Cree Valley Community Resilience Team, a well-established Community Resilience Team pre COVID-19 with experienced and knowledgeable members including ex-emergency services personnel. Over the years

the Team have responded to and given great commitment and dedication to emergency events including the worst flooding in the area for 50 years back in December 2015.



At the beginning of the first lockdown in late March/early April 2020 a letter was posted to all 2438 households in the Cree Valley area offering help with shopping, collecting prescriptions, posting mail, dog walking, putting bins in/out, a friendly phone call to those lonely through isolation and pretty much anything a household needed help with.

To cope with the demand of requests for assistance the team set up a mobile phone number and shared this with the community. Furthermore, they kept their online page updated whereby they posted SupportDG Community Bulletins, DGC messages, local business information and businesses offering support, pharmacy opening times, Home Energy advice and sometimes just reassurance that the team are available if needed. Good news stories and fun quizzes were also posted to lift the spirits of the community.

The Team went even further and, in their response, and support to the developing pandemic, opened a Resilience Hub within McMillan hall in Newton Stewart.

Combined with their mobile phone line, online presence and Resilience Hub, the Team issued “Red Cards” to the community which could be displayed in a window if someone was requiring assistance. Daily patrols of the area by Volunteers, Scottish Fire & Rescue Officers and Galloway Mountain Rescue personnel ensured further requests through this method were identified.

At the end of July 2020, the team stood down from the COVID-19 response and the numerous volunteers encouraged to have a well-deserved break, but reassurance was given that the CRT would remain active in the community and respond again if necessary.

Not all COVID – Winter Weather!

In October 2020 the Team took delivery of a new Polaris Ranger 4x4 and salt gritter to assist with adverse weather (Kilgallioch Community Benefit Fund helped fund this). Forsyth Forestry Training provided training to use the machine and Paterson ATV provided help and support in choosing the right vehicle. It will be used to assist DGC to distribute sandbags and grit in hard-to-reach areas. In the event of an emergency, SFRS, Galloway Mountain Rescue, Police

Scotland and SAS will also be able to access the machine to help keep people safe and get the necessary provisions to all areas of the community.



Its Christmas – but not as we know it!

CV CRT also managed to provide some Christmas cheer and assisted Santa to distribute selection boxes to the schools in Newton Stewart and Minnigaff.



Rounding off the Year

To further support the Cree Valley CR Team Plan, three Public Access Defibrillators were purchased with one having been installed in Newton Stewart.



Happy New Year – New Lockdown

In January 2021, the team rallied again reiterating their message that assistance was available if required due to another lockdown. Furthermore, the Team were on hand and available with the ever-increasing risk of severe weather.

Category 6 – Emotional Support

Background

Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway (TSDG) Touch Base Project

In March 2020 as the UK went into lockdown calls to Dumfries and Galloway Council's (D&G Council) emergency support line increased significantly. It was identified that there was no immediate solution to address the complete stop of face to face contacts which brought about real isolation to members of our communities.

Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway were able to respond to this need with the development of a new responsive project called Touch Base, a telephone companion service. TSDG had signed up 1,000 COVID volunteers and some of these volunteers were used to deliver Touch Base.

Touch Base was launched in May 2020 with D&G Council call handlers using a script to assess if a caller would benefit from a referral to Touch Base. Those callers identified by the D&G Council call handlers that expressed an interest in Touch Base were referred to the service and were contacted by either an Engagement Officer or Associate of TSDG.

The call dealt with any immediate needs, gathered demographic information on each potential Service User and established if Touch Base was required and/or was the appropriate level of service.

In the first week, more than 80 referrals were received. In total Touch Base received more than 170 referrals, the majority being received between May – June 2020. However, as time went on, there was a flurry of referrals in November and December 2020. TSDG at this point recognised a capacity issue with the volunteers and as a result no further referrals were accepted.

Several potential service users were transferred to other services as their issues and needs were deemed to need higher level support. Many potential service users declined Touch Base as they did not need the service. In most cases they had been offered or referred to the service and felt it was 'ungrateful' to decline the offer of support by the D&G Council call handlers. This issue was resolved with changes to the call handlers' script. Once the service need was confirmed and the profile completed the Touch Base Coordinator (an Engagement Officer from TSDG) matched Service Users to Volunteer Phone Companions.

Initially, Touch Base was able to call on support from 12 volunteers from D&G Befriending Project and donations of mobile phones and sim cards from Carphone Warehouse and Tesco. However, call capacity had to be increased due to the huge unanticipated demand for the service, and as volunteers started to leave the service. A further 19 volunteers were recruited between June – August 2020 and a further 5 volunteers were recruited in January 2021. Many volunteers were recruited from the list of TSDG COVID volunteers. The number of service user's volunteers were calling varied from 1 –5, with calls varying from 5 – 45 minutes.

The Phone Companions were asked, initially, to check on food & medicine needs being met, as well as building a relationship. As time has moved on, the calls have included chats about family, holidays, the current COVID situation, the American election, Prince Philip, hobbies & interests. In addition, many of those service users still with Touch Base have health conditions that impact on their daily life and they have been regularly encouraged to contact their GP about their concerns.

In addition, as a result of feedback, the co-ordinator has been able to facilitate lawns being mowed, housing repairs being expedited, Talking books to be sorted, and referrals to Psychology have been made.

As the service was coming to an end, referrals were made to Food Train Friends, and Nithsdale Health & Wellbeing Team.

Case Studies

They were pleased that “someone was keeping in touch”, “watching out for them”, ensuring “someone cared about [them]” or was “keeping an eye on them” and one caller echoed comments reported elsewhere in the report that the call “made [her] week”.

Asked about what they would have done without Touch Base most Service users either preferred not to contemplate that question or they said that they would have “felt a burden on the neighbours”, would have had “no contact outside” or would have got “very depressed”.

Apart from the thanks for the service and praise for all those involved one comment which summarised the connectivity the service gave some users was “Thank you it made me feel like I was back in the land of the living”.

Encouragingly the Touch Base Scheme was also very helpful to the wellbeing of Volunteers. Examples include, “I have also felt a sense of being able to help. Which I think has been good for my wellbeing”, “It’s a 2-way street -it’s been as beneficial for me as my service users” and “Making the calls has helped me to focus when maybe I was feeling a bit low. It gives me satisfaction to feel I am helping someone else”.

Now that Touch Base is winding down, the views of one volunteer who has been with the service since June 2020 sums up the positive ripples that Touch Base has created:

I just wanted to say a big thank you for allowing me to be a volunteer for Touchbase. With being stuck at home last year when this pandemic kicked off, I felt useless not being able to help. For me I feel I have been able to give something back and help in some way.

I spoke to my clients yesterday and they have all said, what a wonderful service this has been, it has helped them in many ways, friendships have been formed. The trust that has been built up, has allowed a couple of them to offload. This on its own has helped them get through a dark day for them. For me this has been a great help also. Stuck at home afraid some days, not knowing what was round the corner, it also enabled me to chat.

Touchbase, has been a wonderful service reaching so many people. The fantastic support from Christine and the Touchbase Team, who are only a phone call or an email away, has enabled myself and many other volunteers to be able to help others during the Pandemic.

The service co-ordinator said “I have felt privileged to have been able to support both the service users and the volunteers during the past 12 months. I have seen volunteers give unstintingly of their time (even calling their service users on Christmas Day as they would be on their own), offer support & guidance to their service users and create friendships. I have learned so much while supporting the volunteers.”

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