Spark COVID19 ACTIVITIES

Since the Covid19 lockdown Spark has, amongst other things,

- Mapped the emerging Covid-19 groups around the county achieved in part by researching newly set up Facebook pages and messaging administrators to establish contact.
- Established a central point on the Spark website to offer quick and easy access to all the latest guidance and best practice guidelines for newly emerging Covid19 response groups. Range of topics covered included safeguarding, health and wellbeing support, cash handling options and practical safety advice for volunteers.
- Created a dedicated Funding Portal focusing initially on Covid19 funding opportunities,
- Ran webinars for Covid19 groups and foodbanks e.g. 'In at the Deep End' and 'Alternatives to Handling Cash'
- Established an online chat facility and created a confidential telephone support service for COVID-19 Group Coordinators (109).
- Established a confidential telephone support service for COVID-19 Group Coordinators, delivered by a qualified coach seconded to work with Spark.
- Developed the Covid Champions programme.
- Brought Covid-19 groups and churches in Yeovil together to collaborate and better coordinate their response and launch a single contact number for support requests - Corona Response Yeovil.
- Administered a Covid-19 Essentials Fund (£1,000) for small un-constituted Covid-19 support groups to apply to for basic essentials. This was particularly aimed at groups with immediate need who didn't have an official bank account.
- Ran a Forum for Food Banks, in partnership with the Trussell Trust
- Developed a Volunteer Pack containing guidance for Covid-19 groups:
  https://www.sparksomerset.org.uk/sites/default/files/u5/Spark%20Somerset%20Volunteer%20Pack%202020.pdf
- Produced a list of outdoor venues that are happy to host other groups for socially-distanced meetings.
- Worked with partners from SCC, CCG and the LPC to trouble-shoot issues related to pharmacy deliveries and volunteers.
- Linked furloughed HPC staff with Somerset Care to carry out improvements in the grounds of care homes.
- Webinar on volunteer management for Covid Groups
- Working with players and staff from Somerset County Cricket Club to run the 'Cuppa Campaign'; packing and sending out care packages to 2000 volunteers during volunteers week.
- Produced a thank you video for Covid-19 volunteers across the county. Viewed by 1000+ users on YouTube:

https://youtu.be/Elc0ddBotj0
- Participated in the local Covid19 Governance arrangements through the Community Resilience and Brokerage cells
- Participated in regional and national VCSE Covid19 discussions including representing Somerset on the national VCS Emergencies Partnership.
- Implemented their brand new bespoke Volunteering platform 'Spark a Change'

Covid Challenges to the VCS

As COVID-19 continues, the voluntary and community sector in Somerset continues to work hard to respond to the needs of the local population. However, there are a number of immediate challenges faced by the sector (which were highlighted in a Covid19 survey undertaken by Spark) which Spark is seeking to address. These can be summarised as:
- **Financial sustainability** - The ability to access future funding has been reduced, including a much-reduced ability to fundraise or generate income through services provided.
- **Reduced capacity and volunteer fatigue** - A loss of current skilled and experienced volunteers, due to self-isolation, other commitments or a requirement to return to their paid roles.
- **Changes in demand** – some organisations are seeing a reduction in demand for their services, whilst others are reporting an exponential increase in need and requests for help and support.
- **Service delivery** – The ability to deliver in the traditional way is severely curtailed and there is a need to flexibly respond to an unknown landscape with an increasing emphasis on digital or other forms of delivery as opposed to face-to-face.
- **Mental health and wellbeing** - There is an increasing need to consider wellbeing implications, in that a lot of voluntary sector organisations can lack resources for staff supervision and volunteer wellbeing support at a time when the need for it is likely to be greater, especially for those frontline services.

Business as Usual Performance

i. The following performance headlines (taken from the April to September 2020 monitoring report) are **in addition to** the plethora of achievements related specifically to Spark's Covid19 activities (see section 8.2(iv) above)

- One-to one support and guidance to 46 community groups in South Somerset
- Published 31 Spark Somerset newsletters/bulletins
  - o 10 General/funding bulletins
  - o 5 training and events
  - o 16 targeted
- Published 8 Mental Health Hub newsletters
- Published 10 VCSE Strategic Forum newsletters
- Ran 5 South Somerset specific VCS online forums (the focus of which was on providing immediate peer support, networking and reassurance for groups as they grappled with the impact of lockdown)
- Ran 6 open county-wide themed forums on Men's Sheds, Food Banks and Covid response.
- Ran 20 online training events covering subjects such as Marketing, Volunteer Management, Safeguarding, Dementia Friends and Mental Health First Aid.
- Launched a free, funding website resource. This received 2,854 visits during this period. Covid specific funding received 1,651 visits.
- Launched a brand new Volunteering Platform, 'Spark a Change' replacing its former volunteering brokerage database with a new digital platform developed by Dutch company Deedmob. 435 organisations and 1474 volunteers registered.
- Published the 2020 Somerset VCS State of the Sector survey (Headline findings Infographic below) **Please note that this survey preceded the outbreak of the Covid pandemic, therefore some of the more optimistic views expressed will have changed.**

Somerset State of the VCSR Sector 2020

2760 registered charities and 100s more community groups and social purpose organisations

73% are 'micro' or 'small' organisations

87% of the workforce are volunteers

68% are currently working in partnership to share expertise and resources

67% have seen an increase in the number of people accessing their service or group in the last year, of which 80% have been able to meet their needs

77% anticipate funding for this year will be the at least the same, or more than last year, but **65%** feel that funding and sustainability is their main future challenge

98% plan to maintain or increase the level of service or activity they provide next year

2021

42% feel more confident or optimistic about their organisation than 12 month prior, with 48% feeling about the same