



Response from Glamorgan Voluntary Services (GVS) to Welsh NHS Confederation about the impact of COVID-19

Introduction to Glamorgan Voluntary Services

Glamorgan Voluntary Services¹ (GVS) is an independent charity and has a flourishing membership of voluntary and community organisations active in the Vale of Glamorgan. We help to improve the quality of life of people and communities by supporting volunteers, volunteering opportunities and voluntary groups.

GVS empowers voluntary groups, providing many channels of engagement and quality services to enable them to excel at serving their communities. Our role is to provide information, advice and guidance on all aspects of volunteering for both volunteers and recruiting organisations.

The Health and Social Care Facilitator in GVS supports the third sector and statutory partners in a number of ways:

- Promoting partnership working within the sector and across sectors
- Promoting third sector organisations and services to statutory partners and vice versa
- Representing the third sector at strategic planning and partnership groups
- Engaging the sector in consultations and engagement about health and social services

In March 2020 when the lockdown started we found an increase in enquiries, exponential growth in volunteer requests and multiple new volunteer groups setting up to help in the crisis.

GVS and third sector organisations mobilised very quickly to support people. DPVC², a charitable organisation in the Vale of Glamorgan, and Age Connects Cardiff and the Vale³, another charitable organisation, were especially helpful and quick to respond during the lockdown.

GVS wanted to support the emerging needs of a changing community and support all members of the third sector in this new and challenging time.

¹ <https://www.gvs.wales/>

² Dinas Powys Voluntary Concern. <http://www.dpvc.org.uk/>

³ <https://www.ageconnectscardiff.org.uk/>

GVS Response

GVS welcomes the opportunity to comment on the impact COVID-19 has had on GVS.

During the first few months of lockdown GVS has had to change how it operates. All staff have had to work from home and change the way that they worked to keep our services running.

The GVS Community Centre, CF61⁴ in Llantwit Major, was shut down to the public and community groups in line with Government guidance. The closure of CF61 caused a loss of income but CF61 recently reopened and has been taking bookings, with social distancing and COVID-19 safe measures to be adhered to.

The Hoddnant room at CF61 has been completely refurbished with state of the art visual and audio equipment to provide a safe and reliable meeting place for businesses and community groups.

FairShare food events have been run from the CF61 centre for the past few weeks, providing free food items for those most in need. This is a crucial service as worry over food has been a common theme throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

The venue is also being used by a local GP surgery to carry out a vaccination programme.

Changing guidance on the use of community centres and local lockdowns have meant that GVS has had to keep up to date on all policies, procedures and risk assessments. Not only did policies change, the community centre itself has had to have upgrades to promote social distancing e.g signs, sneeze screens, PPE, gel dispensers and hands free bins. GVS created and published new governance to assist COVID-19 community venues.

⁴ <https://cf61.wales/>

All meetings and training that would normally take place in person became digital. GVS staff have attended various online meetings, consultations and training sessions. GVS has also run online events and training sessions during this crisis. Online meetings have allowed staff to attend more meetings and training sessions than before as there is no travel time. However, this has also meant that staff wellbeing has become a priority to ensure that the staff do not become fatigued.

Half the staff were redeployed to the areas of work that came under the greatest strain. The two main areas were volunteering and general enquires.

GVS worked with the Vale of Glamorgan Council to set up a scheme where any COVID-19 enquiries that the Vale of Glamorgan Council received would be split between GVS and Age Connects Cardiff and the Vale (a charity that supports older people). The enquiries for people over 65 years of age would go to Age Connects Cardiff and the Vale and from those under 65 years of age would go to GVS. This worked extremely well and showed great partnership between the third sector⁵ and the public sector/local authority. Redeploying staff to deal with the overwhelming enquiries also worked well as staff were able to swiftly answer the growing demand of public enquiries.

157 general enquiries were taken in the first couple of months. Some enquiries were for multiple reasons. These enquiries consisted of 86 enquiries regarding food, 74 enquiries regarding general information, 33 enquiries regarding prescription pick-ups and 27 enquiries requesting information about shielding letters.

Due to the increase in enquiries a directory of services that could assist with COVID-19 enquiries was created⁶. It contained information on various charities, organisations, volunteer groups, pharmacies and food options. This directory also went on to inform the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Vale Heroes website.⁷

⁵ Also known as the Voluntary Sector. 'The part of the [economy](#) that consists of [non-profit-making](#) organizations, as opposed to the public and [private sectors](#).' Collins Dictionary. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/third-sector> [Accessed 15/10/2020]

⁶ GVS COVID-19 directory: <https://www.gvs.wales/support-for-groups/gvs-covid-19-response/directory-of-third-sector-services>

⁷ Vale of Glamorgan Council – Vale Heroes directory: <https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/working/Volunteering/Vale-Heroes/Vale->

The directory has been well received. Often organisations view directories as old fashioned and difficult to update regularly. But the response to the GVS COVID-19 directory has shown that they are still highly regarded.

In four months GVS received 991 volunteer enquiries. However, while volunteering enquiries increased, volunteering opportunities decreased dramatically and at one point there were only two active volunteering opportunities in the Vale of Glamorgan. This slowly changed as COVID-19 volunteering groups were set up by the communities. Volunteering enquiries have received a massive influx and redeploying staff allowed for GVS to handle the strain. New volunteering opportunities were slow in being created but the two active volunteering opportunities available managed to handle the initial wave of volunteers. The Good Sam scheme⁸ meant that there was a lot of confusion in the beginning but marketing of the Volunteering Wales website⁹ solved that situation. The Volunteering Wales website is a Wales wide directory of volunteering opportunities supported and overseen by the various volunteer centres. After marketing the Wales Volunteering website there was a second wave of volunteering enquiries.

Funding has been a prominent part of the lockdown with multiple funding streams redesigning themselves to help combat COVID-19 and the challenges of lockdown. This has helped the communities who have taken the initiative to help in any way that they could.

Funding is a prominent issue for the third sector as fundraising activities were curtailed and, whilst this was not an issue for GVS, it has impacted on our work as more organisations struggle for funding and more organisations apply for small grants.

Multiple funding streams were overseen by GVS. As of October 2020, over £250,000 has been awarded. These funding streams have been made available by various partners: Vale of Glamorgan Council, Welsh Government via

[Heroes.aspx#:~:text=Vale%20Heroes%20is%20bringing%20together,by%20the%20Covid%2D19%20outbreak](#)

⁸ England only NHS volunteering opportunities: <https://www.goodsamapp.org/>

⁹ https://volunteering-wales.net/vk/shared_includes/aboutus.htm

WCVA, Comic Relief, Integrated Care Fund (ICF) and Cardiff and Vale Health Charity.

The third sector has benefited from ICF and Transformation funding, but these funds are relatively small amounts and have short timescales. There are many benefits our statutory partners can gain from a well resourced, strong, sustainable third sector and we hope that the essential nature of third sector services and the added value they bring will continue to be acknowledged.

GVS staff attended weekly FoodVale meetings during the lockdown to discuss food distribution and the Vale of Glamorgan Council food boxes. FoodVale¹⁰ is a partnership of multiple organisations who seek to inspire healthy choices and create a cohesive way of working. GVS provided updates on local third sector organisations that were hosting food banks or volunteers who would pick up food orders.

Practical services such as printing and design reduced in number, however, marketing greatly increased. GVS advertised the COVID-19 health news from various public bodies and advertised several grant funding opportunities and briefing sessions on various topics.

Governance enquiries stayed at the level they were before lockdown, however their focus shifted to two types of enquires: How to operate constitutionally under the lockdown and setting up organisations in response to the crisis.

GVS was consulted on a hospital discharge document that the Health Board had created. GVS identified how the third sector contributes to the direction as outlined in the Welsh Government guidance on hospital discharge.

PPE was not a huge priority for GVS at the beginning of the lockdown as all staff were working from home. This allowed GVS to obtain PPE in time for CF61 to reopen. However, GVS did receive enquiries from organisations struggling to source PPE. The Vale of Glamorgan Council has been active in providing the third sector with supplies of PPE which has been much appreciated. Also, a member of the Senedd and Ford in Bridgend have asked us to distribute PPE equipment (visors) to various third sector organisations and community groups which we are currently overseeing.

¹⁰ <https://foodvale.org/>

Local community knowledge helped GVS, and other third sector organisations, to provide a swift response to COVID-19. It was the relationship that GVS developed with the local community and links with local community groups that has allowed GVS to meet the area's needs.

GVS adapted rapidly to the developing situation and continues to adapt as the situation changes. GVS continues to support the community and its members in any way that is needed.

