

ELGC COV VS 23

Ymchwiliad i COVID-19 a'i effaith ar y sector gwirfoddol

Inquiry into COVID-19 and its impact on the voluntary sector

Ymateb gan: Helpforce Cymru

Response from: Helpforce Cymru

Submission to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee inquiry into the impact of Covid-19 on the Voluntary sector.

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Helpforce perspective

[Helpforce](#) aims to develop the potential of volunteering in health and care services, working in England mainly with NHS organisations and across the UK through national partnerships.

In Wales, [Helpforce Cymru](#) is hosted by Wales Council for Voluntary Action, part funded by Welsh Government, informed by Wales own policy context and supported by a Wales steering group.

During Covid-19 the work broadened to engage with all aspects of the volunteering response to the pandemic.

Volunteering and community resilience - themes and issues

Conversations and meetings during the first three months of Covid-19 have been analysed to distil key themes and issues. These are presented diagrammatically in Annexe 1, under the headings of a) volunteer response, b) volunteering through Covid-19 and c) Volunteering post Covid-19.

A presentation at a UK research conference of the Voluntary Sector Studies Network, delivered jointly with Wales Centre for Public Policy, explored the preconditions for effective volunteer response, based on analysis of over 50 collected case studies. These fell under four broad headings:

- Local knowledge
- Resourcefulness and flexibility
- Relationships
- Infrastructure and support in place

The presentation is included in Annexe 2 and a blog (not yet published) based on this work in Annexe 3.

Future opportunities and challenges

The spectrum of volunteering includes a very wide range from informal, community action to more formally managed and focussed roles and tasks. (The presentation in Annexe 2 highlights examples which fall between these extremes).

In considering the strategic opportunities to be gained from volunteering, these need to be considered separately; a few comments therefore are offered on each below.

Informal community volunteer response

This unprecedented response proved to be speedy, creative and effective, bringing existing resources and initiatives together locally and attracting new support.

There is a challenge to build on this by:

- Supporting the sustainability and the independence of local groups
- Connecting with other local provision by statutory and voluntary sector partners, to enable joined-up services
- Conversation and better mutual understanding about appropriate levels of risk associated with different activity and context

Formal volunteering eg to support the NHS

It was notable that during Covid-19:

- a) no local CVC or Health Board experienced a lack of volunteers
- b) formal opportunities for volunteering were in short supply, largely because of the need to reassess and redefine or adapt existing roles and processes, or to develop new ones.
- c) health boards took very different approaches to volunteer involvement, including pausing all volunteering, focussing on patient welfare and developing frontline roles in field hospitals.

d) some effective working partnerships with local County Voluntary Councils and voluntary organisations were demonstrated.

There is a challenge to build on this by:

- Promoting cross sector working between statutory and voluntary organisations in order to enable more rapid and flexible involvement of volunteers
- Encouraging conversations at strategic levels about the role of volunteering, including risk and governance issues, the planning and investment required and benefits to be gained
- Building up a trained and flexible volunteer base in order to complement ongoing clinical care and to meet future unexpected demands.