**Voluntary Action Coventry - Covid-19 statement**

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**23rd March 2020**

Voluntary Action Coventry are working with other similar organisations in towns and cities across the country to give out consistent messages regarding the corona virus pandemic and volunteering.

## What you can do now

The simplest thing everyone can do right now **is look out for their neighbours** and offer help with shopping and other errands if people cannot get out of the house.

And it's not just about neighbours who are self-isolating, stretched medical staff might also appreciate an offer of help.

**There’ll be more information on the best ways to volunteer in the coming days**. Charities are working with the government and local authorities to create ways for people to get involved. Remember it’s a **marathon not a sprint** – we’re not at the peak and the time we need most people will likely be in a few weeks’ time. So, for now the best thing to do is just check in on neighbours.

If you do want to register to support local charities then please **contact:**

**Voluntary Action Coventry** on **024 7622 0381** or email [f.middleton@vacoventry.org.uk](mailto:f.middleton@vacoventry.org.uk) and we will link you to charities in need of urgent support.

Local foodbanks will appreciate donations, and they may also need people to help with deliveries for those who can't leave the house.

Charities are under a lot of pressure right now so don’t worry if they don’t get back to you immediately – they’ll be in touch when they need you.

## All charities will need help

Lots of volunteering now for all sorts of charities is done by people who may not be able to volunteer right now. With older people in-particular advised to stay at home, the organisations that rely on them will be hit.

So now is actually a really good time to get in touch with local charities working on areas you care about – whether that’s the environment or health or anything – and see how you can help.

## Could people be using this as a way to abuse vulnerable or older people? Shouldn’t volunteers have checks?

99.9% of people absolutely want to do the right thing – but the sad reality is there are always a handful of people who’ll exploit any situation to take advantage.

That’s the reason why charities have things in place like DBS checks, insurance and references and why charities have procedures in place to prevent people from being able to take advantage.

## Can anyone set themselves up as a support group?

Anyone can set up a group and it’s great that people have a natural impulse to do that. But of course people do need to be careful about the situations they’re putting themselves in.

We need to be conscious that it’s not just about protecting potentially vulnerable people but also avoiding putting themselves in a situation where they’re vulnerable to being accused of wrongdoing.

**I’d be especially wary of handling people’s money, or going into people’s home alone, for example.**

Once you start to form an organisation you encounter more legal responsibilities, even if you didn’t mean to. One of those is about how you’re managing safeguarding and a common part of doing that is DBS checks along with references and so on. And there are laws around this and it’s quite complicated.

That’s part of why the best advice for now is just to check on neighbours – if everyone does this we’ll be doing really well.

## Do you need a DBS check if you’re delivering food to an elderly person?

Most volunteering roles don’t need criminal records checks. But if you were working or volunteering with an organisation and the role involved you providing care to a potentially vulnerable people, then they’d normally require a check for that.

That’s one of the reasons why you should be careful about what you’re doing if you’re volunteering for one of these new groups.

**In particular, it’s best to avoid being alone with anyone who might be considered vulnerable, to protect everyone involved.**

So sign up with local charities who’ll be in touch when they need you and look out for more official advice on getting involved over the coming week or so.

## Charities are going to be under pressure. How can people help?

Absolutely – charities are going to be stretched. Lots of fundraising events that would have taken place have had to be cancelled. At the same time, many people who volunteer may not be able to, especially if they’re being advised to stay at home.

It’s not just about charities dealing immediately with coronavirus, this will affect all charities in one way or another.

The best thing to do is keep supporting the causes you care about. The British public are incredibly generous and we really need their help to keep our work going. So if there’s a cause you care about, they’d particularly appreciate a donation right now.

## I’m feeling lonely and isolated, can you help?

Yes – our **Chat Central** project is trying to help people get through this challenging time by offering virtual workshops, meetings and telephone support. If you or someone you know would like to connect please get in touch: [chatcentral@vacoventry.org.uk](mailto:chatcentral@vacoventry.org.uk) or call Heather on 07840 550 801.

Contact us:

Voluntary Action Coventry

27-29 Trinity Street, Coventry, CV1 1FJ

T: 024 7622 0381

[www.vacoventry.org.uk](http://www.vacoventry.org.uk)