

SK Community Hub - Case Studies

Overview

Since it opened on Saturday 21st March 2020 the SK Community Hub (known as the Hub) has dealt with over 1800 requests for help, offers of help and general advice enquiries. During its first few weeks the Hub received a remarkable response from local people – some connected to existing community groups; some individually putting themselves forward and all offering to help those in need. Many of the early calls centred around what type of help would be available to people and, with an ever-growing database of community support, the Hub was able to provide reassurance from the earliest stage that, when people needed help, it would be there. The Hub has dealt with contacts that have by turns been, heart-breaking and heart-warming.

Helping the Stranded

In its first week the Hub had contact from two sets of ‘stranded’ people. One – a couple from Guernsey who had been on a cruise and had stopped off in England to visit friends in Lincolnshire. Then, because travel restrictions and lockdown were introduced, they weren’t allowed to return to the Channel Islands so had set up temporary home in South Kesteven. The husband was classified as clinically vulnerable and, while the wife was able to go shopping, she, a retired nurse, felt it would put her husband at greater risk if she mixed with people from outside their household. As a clinically vulnerable person the husband was eligible for a Government-provided food parcel. Registering for a food parcel also allowed people access to supermarket delivery slots so the Hub provided details of how and where to register and our visitors from Guernsey stayed safe. The second case was much more complicated. On the second Saturday of the Hub’s existence contact was made by a person representing nine Cuban circus performers stranded just outside Grantham and having to live in the truck they would have been touring the country in had they been able to work. They weren’t able to work because their visas only allowed them to perform in the circus and they had been told they couldn’t fly home to Cuba because no flights were going into South America at that time. As freelance performers they had no access to financial support and no access to food or supplies. Foodbank would have been the obvious solution but that wouldn’t open again until Monday and these people were desperate. The Hub called a local faith group to see if there was any chance they could help. Within a couple of hours they delivered what they thought would be enough food to keep these nine individuals fed for a week – only to discover that there were fourteen others, including children, living on the circus winter quarters with no support. The remarkable dedication and outstanding generosity of that faith group has kept all of those people fed for 10 weeks. The Hub has arranged support for additional food and toiletries through Grantham Foodbank. The Hub emailed the Cuban Consulate in the hope that some support would be available for its people but received no response. The local MP then took up the case.

Foodbanks

South Kesteven’s four Foodbanks have all had to adapt their operations in order to continue to meet the needs of those in financial crisis at this time. Voucher systems have either been suspended or amended to allow for referrals by phone (vouchers completed at Foodbanks for audit purposes) or via electronic vouchers sent through prior to opening times. All of the Foodbanks have offered delivery services to those who are self-isolating or are unable to travel to the Foodbank to collect a food parcel. In Grantham we facilitated a partnership between the Foodbank and Rotary Club so that this service could be provided within a 10 mile radius of the town. Under normal operating circumstances Foodbank vouchers are issued by a number of front-line organisations – Job Centre+, schools, faith groups etc and via a number of SKDC service areas (Housing, Benefits for example). These would be paper vouchers signed by the person issuing and the person needing a Foodbank parcel. Stamford, Bourne and Deepings Foodbanks all continued to work with their existing partners but many of the usual issuing agencies were either closed altogether or working remotely potentially closing off avenues of support for people in need. Systems were quickly adapted in order that they could continue to meet the needs of the financially vulnerable. Once lockdown was introduced Grantham foodbank

supplied e vouchers so that no contact between issuer and recipient was needed. From week one of lockdown all vouchers issued via SKDC were coordinated through the Hub and, once the delivery service became operational the Hub became the sole issuer of delivery vouchers for the Grantham Foodbank. Since week one of lockdown the Hub has issued Foodbank vouchers/deliveries of food, toiletries and other essential supplies in support of 114 adults, 65 children, 4 cats and 3 dogs.

BHive and Evergreen

We worked with both BHive in Grantham and Evergreen Trust in Stamford to help establish cash crisis 'banks' for people who, although they had the means to pay for shopping and essentials, had no access to their own cash because they were shielding or self-isolating. What became clear in the first few weeks of lockdown was that, whilst we could support through the network of volunteers, people who needed food or prescriptions collecting and those who were shielding because of clinical vulnerability would be getting essential supplies via Government food parcels, there was another raft of people who were struggling because they relied on cash to pay for their goods and services. Evergreen was able to cover the south of the district and BHive could cover the north with Corby Glen providing the north/south divide. People over seventy had been asked to stay home as much as possible and that, for some, meant the weekly trip out to collect their pension and 'do a bit of shopping' was curtailed. It was evident that, as the weeks went on, the money people had access to would run out and then they would not be able to pay for the food and supplies the volunteers were bringing to them. The two systems worked differently. The system in the south operated thus: volunteers who worked with Evergreen who go to the 'bank', collect the money they needed in order to do a person's shopping and the recipient would be invoiced. The person could pay by cheque or, if they had no chequebook or cash, they could pay later, once lockdown was eased. The system in the north via BHive also allowed people to be able to pay the volunteer group for their shopping by means of card payment (at an appropriate distance).

Parishes, towns and community groups

Much of the coordination of the volunteer effort during lockdown has been provided by the town and parish councils of the district. Whilst some newly formed community groups set themselves up in isolation, many partnered with a town or parish council to deliver the essential support needed to their local communities. As part of the partnership working between ourselves and the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum (LRF) all groups that had either registered via the SK Community Hub or LRF were contacted to ensure appropriate governance and policy were in place. For the town and parish councils this was a given – already established, constituted and the third layer of local government they had a presence within their communities. New groups were offered a health-check and assistance to ensure they were fit for purpose. These groups, and the volunteers working within them, could also take advantage of indemnity insurance via Lincolnshire County Council. We are aware that there are groups that neither registered with the Hub or the LRF that are operating in our communities. This, in a rural district, is to be expected – smaller communities where everyone knows everyone will inevitably work together to support one another, and that is to be applauded. In towns, some groups partnered with the town councils and some worked independently. Larger, more densely situated populations often require increased levels of support – not because of greater need – merely because of greater numbers of people with varying needs. In Grantham, at the start of lockdown, the Hub worked with individual volunteers to meet the needs of the people of the town. This was time consuming and often put pressure on a relatively small pool of people. Through working with BHive it became evident that it could be the central coordinating organisation for Grantham and the north of the district. The individual volunteers that had already signed up with the Hub and any that came forward in subsequent weeks were encouraged to become a BHive Buddy giving them the protection of an umbrella organisation and the indemnity insurance offered by LCC.