



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

COVID-19

Burntwood Town Council

Burntwood Be A Friend

Burntwood Be A Friend was set up to help any individuals in need of support, from emergency food parcels to prescription collections, and to offer advice on concerns and problems via signposting

Context

To meet local demand, the Burntwood Be A Friend (BBAF) scheme was created immediately before lockdown. Working in collaboration with St Ann's and St John's churches, Spark children's centre, local businesses, and the local Foodbank, the Town Council initially acted as an umbrella organisation to bring numerous partners together. The Council wanted to ensure that all residents could easily access support as it was aware there were pockets of significant deprivation in the town, that many families were already under financial stress and that the area had a relatively high number of older adults living alone. When lockdown was announced the Be a Friend partnership immediately set up a telephone helpline, email address and Facebook page and coordinated over 80 volunteers, including eight Town Councillors, to promote services. These included shopping, delivery of emergency food parcels, collecting prescriptions and responding to a whole range of other queries. As a result it reached over 13,000 users in Burntwood out of a town of 28,000, by the end of March. While numbers of active volunteers reduced as people have returned to work, as of September, BBAF had over 130 volunteers.

Development

To finance the scheme the Council provided an emergency grant of £1,000 and applied for grant assistance of £2,500 from the County Council's Covid-19 Support Fund. This enabled activities to start immediately and provided money for publicity posters and a leaflet delivered to every one of the 11,000 houses in the town. To promote BBAF the Council worked closely with the two churches and Spark who already had a strong track record of community action and ready pools of supporters. In addition, the Town Council was able to pull in additional help and support via its own networks. The cooperation and collaboration



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between all stakeholders was been exemplary and BBAF has now become the “go-to” organisation for anyone needing help and advice. By working closely with the Trussell Trust, Citizens’ Advice Bureau, local schools, Live at Home (Methodist Homes for the Aged), and other charitable projects locally, the BBAF project is able to meet needs that are not met by any other provider – a true, strong, collaborative and co-operative partnership.

Implementation

The helpline, email address and Facebook presence were set up from the outset, all facilitated by volunteers from an increasing number of local partner groups and individuals. Databases of volunteers who were DBS-checked and had received Safeguarding training was facilitated by Spark who have significant expertise in this arena. Support also came from countywide third sector organisations, Support Staffordshire and Staffordshire Council for Voluntary Youth Services. The Council Leader, also a County Councillor, took part in district-wide collaboration teleconferences for volunteer organisations, enabling BBAF to be linked into district and county-wide emerging issues and opportunities from access to emergency food to grants available. BBAF continues to provide free food and toiletry parcels (100+ per week), cooked meals (200+ per week), prescriptions and shopping (300+ since March) and telephone befriending (100+ per week). It has worked with the local Foodbank, FareShare and local supermarkets and has set up four community ‘help yourself’ surplus food tables, new baby bonding packs and resources (30 so far). It is also now sourcing furniture and household items for the homeless/vulnerable. The social capital in the town has increased dramatically with a focus on social justice for those most disadvantaged yet equal access to all residents, whatever their needs. The visibility of the levels of disadvantage within the town, ostensibly a fairly comfortable one, has increased with all stakeholders now having greater awareness of this.



Councillor Sue Woodward

Review

BBAF has been hugely successful and all partners want to build on this, promoting greater self-reliance in order to prevent social isolation and increase independence. As the economic, social and health effects of the pandemic become more clearly understood, BBAF

continues to support those with previously hidden needs such as homelessness or housing vulnerabilities. This includes many residents who have previously felt excluded or marginalised from the community. The activities are changing and developing as BBAF moves into the Recovery phase. While continuing to provide emergency support, plans for the future include:

- creating a new community infrastructure organisation to sustain and grow the BBAF support offer and expand and make permanent services such as the baby bank, family activity packs and baby packs for new-borns.
- developing support options for vulnerable adults e.g. Front Door Friends (a personal contact, socially distanced befriending service) and Thinking Of You packs for single isolated adults.

For further information contact:

Cllr Sue Woodward

Staffordshire County Councillor and Leader of Burntwood Town Council

susan.woodward@burntwood-tc.gov.uk | 07779 473 961 | www.burntwood-tc.gov.uk