



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

COMMUNITY

The Active Wellbeing Society working with Birmingham City Council

Creating a co-operative community

The Active Wellbeing Society (TAWS) is a Birmingham-based community benefit society and cooperative working with communities in areas of high deprivation to tackle inequality and promote wellbeing. Ordinarily focused on supporting communities to be more physically, socially and civically active, their work changed overnight in March 2020.

Context

As supermarket shelves emptied and services shut their doors, many were concerned about the devastating impact Covid-19 would have on vulnerable communities. In Birmingham, where 40% of people live in the top 10% most deprived households nationally, poverty was already a significant issue. The pandemic exposed and exacerbated levels of inequality, and TAWS turned their work to help meet the changing needs of its communities.

Action

In less than one week they established a community-led food distribution network, involving mutual aid groups, faith groups and community organisations, which included more than 85 partners and over 1,300 volunteers. Working collaboratively, they set up a distribution hub in the city where they have delivered over 1,000 tonnes of surplus food via 200,000 food parcels and 42,000 cooked meals.

“You’ve been reliably like clockwork providing me with food parcels for the last 3 months @TAW Society. Thank you for keeping me alive. I feel valued by my fellow citizens in Birmingham.” Parcel recipient

TAWS were supported to do this by existing funders, Sport England, Birmingham City Council and Our Health Partnership, and new ones, National Lottery Community Fund, BVSC and DEFRA who understood the need to be flexible during a time of uncertainty.



Co-operation

The collective, city-wide action has characterised the emergency food response, none of it would've been possible without everyone stepping up and pulling together, doing what needed to be done.

"I was particularly pleased to see the TAWS work... [they] helped with facilitating everything, which was exactly what it needed." Volunteer

The city-wide emergency food distribution network has now become the Food Justice Network, with over 200 members, working together to tackle food poverty. TAWS has united the voluntary sector across Birmingham through this network, embodying cooperative principles and working to tackle inequality. Now, they continue to co-operate for system change, whether that's taking action to increase skills and employment opportunities, to support physical and mental health or to improve access to food.



For further information contact:

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