

How our communities supported and shaped the COVID-19 response

The annual report of the Director of Public Health 2022

Foreword

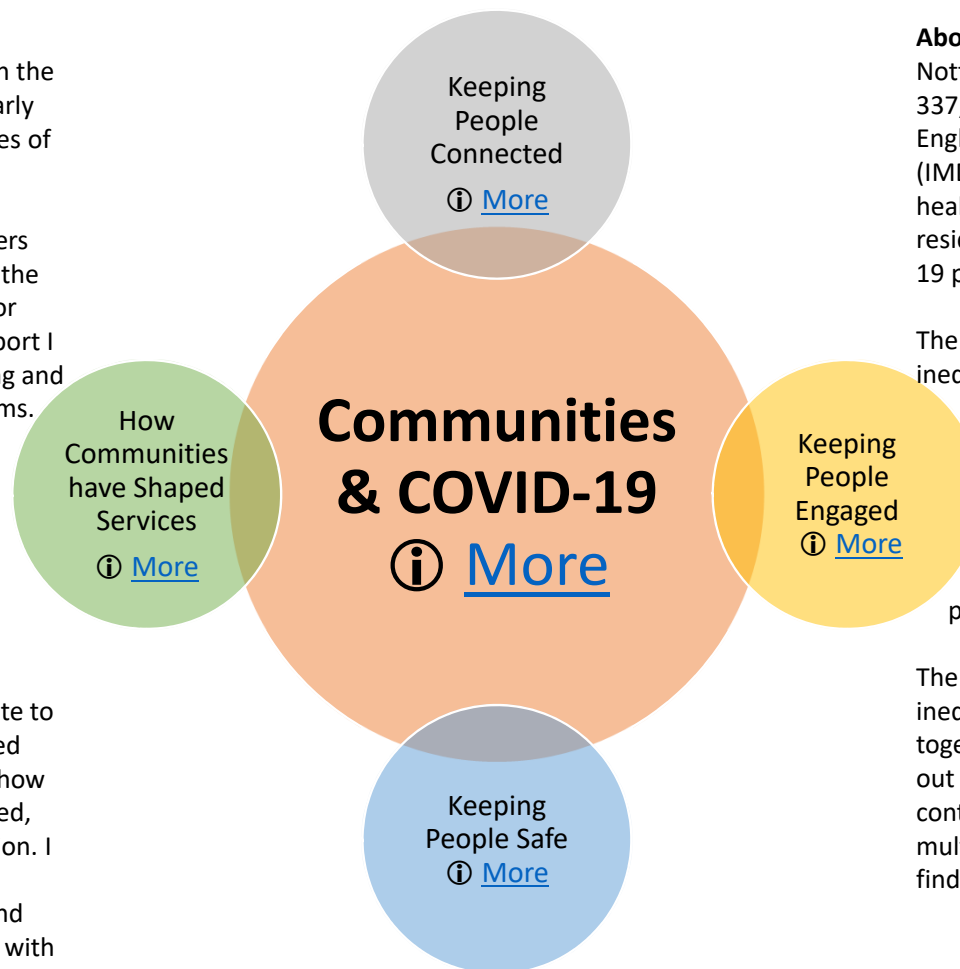
The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on the people of Nottingham. At the time of writing, nearly 1000 people have died from COVID-19 and the lives of many more people have significantly changed.

We have seen amazing work from front-line workers including teachers, NHS staff, social care workers, the people who collect our rubbish, pay our benefits or keep our houses safe. Of course, in my annual report I also want to pay tribute to the diligent, unrelenting and challenging work undertaken by public health teams.

We thank our colleagues in UKHSA and OHID for their guidance and leadership at all hours, seven days a week. My public health team stepped into new roles, learned new skills and worked tirelessly to keep the population safe. I am proud of all they achieved and the strong legacy for future working that they have created.

However, in this annual report, I want to pay tribute to the amazing ways in which our communities looked after each other. There are so many examples of how our residents made sure that other people were fed, kept safe, given company at a time of huge isolation. I wouldn't capture all the examples, so this report highlights examples across a number of themes and considers important lessons for how we can work with communities in the future.

Lucy Hubber, Director of Public Health



About Nottingham

Nottingham, with its population of approximately 337,000, is ranked 11th most deprived district in England in the 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). In the UK, it is one of only two cities with a healthy life expectancy less than 60 years. Many of its residents were therefore vulnerable prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated inequalities in our communities. Following the guidance and regulations was more difficult for some people, perhaps because of their job, home environment, access to computers or worries about money. Some people were at greater risk because of other health conditions and this meant extended periods of isolation and shielding.

The only way that we can challenge and change the inequalities in health within Nottingham is by working together. The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy sets out four priorities for change: Smoking & Tobacco control; Eating and moving for good health; Severe multiple disadvantage; and Financial wellbeing. You can find out more information [here](#).

i Click on a circle to find out more

Case study - Good companions

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- **Launched an outreach service in March 2020 as an immediate response when government guidelines meant that all group gatherings had to cease**
- **Set up a managers group which met monthly to support the management committee during the pandemic**
- **Continue to recruit volunteers mainly by zoom and teams platforms during the lockdown.**

Challenges

2020 was a very unusual year and good companions services were affected by the global pandemic of COVID-19. This altered the services and support offered to both service users and volunteers. Lockdown was a really lonely and isolated period for elderly people and those who were shielding. Maintaining effective communication between the management committee and recruiting volunteers for the body to be challenging task due to lockdown.

Case study - Good companions (continued)

Approach

Good companions was established in December 2001 in response to a survey carried out within Clifton, Wilford and Silverdale areas of Nottingham in 1999 by social action research project. The Survey identified many older people living alone and socially isolated due to lack of available support from family, friends, statutory or voluntary services. Initially started at the home visiting scheme supplemented by a weekly friendship group. In 2018 with companions were successful in applying for funds, using the money to set up additional friendship groups. When the government introduced the lockdown in March 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic, all Friendship groups and home visiting ceased and an outreach support scheme was implemented which continue to the end of 2020 and beyond.

- Various adaptations to the services included phone befriending scheme, shopping for those who were shielding, collection and delivery of medicines, social media for fortnightly coffee chats with service users, a WhatsApp group for service users who attended Friendship groups to enable them to keep in touch with each other. Service users frequently mentioned the feelings of support an assistance they felt from receiving regular phone calls from either the volunteers or a coordinator. They felt that this offset some of their feelings of loneliness, isolation and of feeling down. Response from a service user.

'I have missed the Friendship Groups so much during lockdown. I can't thank you enough for the phone calls. I think it's brilliant what you do. I can't wait for this to be over and get back to the groups. It's helped me so much hearing from [Co-ordinator]. I wish there was a lot more caring people around. You are all so nice and kind, you give me the motivation to carry on.'

Case study - Good companions (continued)

Approach (continued)

- Newsletter parcel delivered to all service users and volunteers from March 2020 onwards by volunteers who were not isolating, it was very well received. A theme was planned for each month focussing on activities held within the Friendship Groups, including Easter, spring, afternoon tea, exercise and relaxation, Harvest Festival, Bonfire Night and Christmas. Feedbacks from the service users have been really positive e.g
'The services that Good Companions have given has been a real lifeline for me. The treats and puzzles make a lovely break in the lonely times of lockdown. It is nice to know we haven't been forgotten about.'
- Pre-pandemic the management committee met once during the year. During 2020, in order to support the management committee during the pandemic a managers group was set up which met monthly. Communication between this group was facilitated via Zoom and WhatsApp platforms.
Good companions continued to advertise for new volunteers through variety of medium including Facebook page and NCVS database. Various online platforms were used to conduct interviews, introduction discussions and volunteer meetings. A training programme was assembled for volunteers in 2020 including first aid, dementia awareness, food hygiene and adult safeguarding.

Case study - Smoking Cessation in Pregnancy

- Smoking in pregnancy is an important public health issue and is a significant cause of low birth weight and associated health issues. Quitting at any stage of pregnancy confers benefits for both mother and baby. However, this population is recognised to be a challenging one to engage. In Nottingham, rates in pregnancy remain amongst the highest in the UK.
- The Smoking in Pregnancy (SIP) service in Nottingham has typically been a face-to-face service involving carbon monoxide monitoring, and attendance rates have been poor, with drop off in adherence throughout the course of pregnancy.
- The pandemic led to a shift in this service to virtual appointments and pregnant smokers were provided with carbon monoxide meters at home.

Case study - Smoking Cessation in Pregnancy (continued)

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- The virtual appointments meant that there was more flexibility with appointment times and women did not need to travel or make arrangements for childcare or with work to attend. As a result of this, virtual clinics achieved greater attendance rates and cessation rates amongst pregnant women in Nottingham improved.
- The general smoking cessation service 'Stub it', which worked independently of the pregnancy service prior to the pandemic, started to work together with the service to see family/household members making the approach more holistic.
- This was a fantastic success story of the pandemic and feedback from service users has been overwhelmingly positive.
- Going forward, the SIP is offering a hybrid model for smoking cessation services where patients have the choice to attend in person or virtually. Additionally, they continue to work with the general cessation team, referring household women and women at 6 weeks postnatally. It is hoped that the cessation rates continue to improve with this adapted model.

Case study - The Secret Garden Project

- A most magical community-led project that has brought those of all ages and generations together.
- What was an unused green space in Heathfield Park has been transformed by the community, for the community, into a flower and vegetable garden.
- Sessions are several times a week and are an opportunity for those without their own gardens or outdoor space to be involved in planting and looking after the garden as well as to come together as a community to enrich the outdoor space. It has been a way for neighbours to meet, friendships to form and during the pandemic and the lockdowns, a treasured outdoor activity that was able to continue and provide for the community that created it.



Case study - The Secret Garden Project (continued)



- As a tribe, The Secret Garden Project spread the message of the importance of sustainability and promote the healing nature of gardening. They also cook outdoors, do crafts for children and adults and other wellbeing activities. They also arrange large scale community litter-picks!
- The pandemic only served to highlight its importance to the community and following on from the fantastic work that they have done, they have started to branch out, developing other local green spaces across Nottingham, one being Silverdale Park in Basford.
- More information can be found on their Instagram @secretgardenspace



- **Quickly set up an active digital presence via zoom and teams' platforms to keep in touch with each other internally and the sector who relied on it for information.**
- **Launched a new CRM system and a website during the first week of lockdown. The online platform hosted a volunteering portal and within six weeks of lockdown over 1000 people registered to volunteer.**
- **Partnered with Nottingham city council to run Nottingham star campaign to recognise the incredible given spirit of Nottingham citizens through formal and informal volunteering.**

Challenges

The main challenges were to ensure NCVS didn't drop any services while adjusting to complete remote working. They owned a building at the time and had to keep open safely due to needs of their tenants who employ key worker staff looking after vulnerable people. Government guidelines were followed to ensure everyone working in the building was as safe as possible.

NCVS trained everyone quickly to use zoom and teams and within a short time were able to move all training sessions and network meetings online which proved quite successful.

Case study – NCVS (continued)

Approach:

- NCVS very quickly realised that the outpouring need of volunteering could not be processed manually under their old system. So, they quickly launched a new CRM system and a website during the first week of lockdown which enabled them to communicate much better with the sector and help register of 1000 people within the first six weeks. This also brought forth new volunteer roles as the need for food delivery, dog walking and prescription pickups became vital to shielding vulnerable residents. Throughout the rest of first year of pandemic the volunteer numbers swelled to over 2000 and to date and NCVS has registered over 3000 volunteers many of them are still active.
- NCVS also supported the sector by providing a page on the website that organisations used to put information about the changes to the services due to the pandemic restrictions. SPICE foundation and Nottingham Women's centre is one of many projects that were facilitated by NCVS to provide the changes to the services due to the pandemic.

Examples:

- **Spice Foundation** is a small charity based in Nottingham delivering a range of projects to help vulnerable adults mitigating the effects of food poverty. NCVS helped SPICE foundation recruit a lot of volunteers to help with meals preparation, packing and delivery. They also had a wellbeing and support helpline mainly focussed on addressing loneliness. The helpline provided a shoulder to lean on and signposted the vulnerable individuals.
- **Nottingham Women's centre:** Before COVID they collected surplus food and was available at the centre. Due to COVID Some women have had to self-isolate for various reasons and could not go shopping. These issues were addressed by setting up a regular food delivery service to help women who were struggling across the city. An amazing volunteer team was called out who could drive and do food delivery service. These volunteer drivers collected the food from a member of staff's home, where it has already been split into parcels and then leave them on the women's doorsteps every Tuesday. Some really positive feedback were received from the women with one saying **"We received it and are so happy for it, we're having sandwiches in the garden this afternoon"**.
- For more information <https://www.nottinghamcvcs.co.uk/news-and-events/news-articles/changes-to-services>
- NCVS celebrated volunteer week 2020, to celebrate and recognise efforts of Nottingham volunteers, charities and volunteer groups in response to COVID-19 by teaming up in Nottingham city council to set up a Nottingham star campaign. As part of the campaign 40,000 postcards were distributed by NCVS and Nottingham city council to community groups across the city.

Case study – NCVS (continued)

Approach (continued)

- Alongside this NCVS ran a three-week campaign of Community Action Stories. Particularly touching is Dear Friend scheme in partnership with Nottinghamshire Healthcare to help patients feel less isolated and alone at Lings Bar Hospital, West Bridgford. The scheme involved cards and letters to be sent by volunteers to patients in the hospital, who because of the coronavirus and shielding restrictions were unable to receive visitors. Since the scheme was launched, approximately 600 letters have been received from volunteers across the county, much to the delight of the patients and staff at the hospital. All have been really touched by the effort made by the letter writers.
- The letters and cards have enabled the staff to sit with patients and read a letter together have a chat about the contents and provide a chance to share a conversation that isn't about illness or anxiety.
- Here you will find some video of the amazing work of the voluntary sector <https://www.nottinghamcvs.co.uk/volunteering/community-action-stories>.

Case study – The Nottingham Vaccination Programme

- 1/3 of Nottingham's population are from BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) background groups, groups that are known to be disproportionately impacted by covid-19.
- During the pandemic, communities in Nottingham rallied to address discrepancies in vaccination rates amongst BME groups.
- Many faith groups to include local mosques and the Majority Black Led Churches of Nottingham understood the barriers facing their communities and provided practical solutions.
- Stories shared by communities include the recruitment of ethnically sensitive vaccinators & those that spoke the local languages in areas where many of the local community did not speak English as a first language. Anecdotally this was key in encouraging those who were hesitant to be vaccinated and in making the process clearer and easier for them.
- Setting choice was also of importance and pop-up Covid vaccine centres were set up in Nottingham mosques to encourage more people to have the jab in places they were familiar with.

Case study – The Nottingham Vaccination Programme (continued)

- There was also a separate booking system with a link that could be shared amongst community & religious WhatsApp groups which meant that not only did they not have to navigate the national booking portal but that there was good availability local to them if they did not have means or ability to travel and that there was ability for families and neighbours to attend as a group, with support of the younger generations for older.
- Radio segments with opportunity for Q&A with local GPs and public health consultants on a local radio station KEMET FM, well listened to by local black communities were well received.
- The use of social media by those respected by the communities was also very helpful in engaging them in the vaccination programme. For example a video of a local imam being vaccinated shared on social media in Nottingham led to a significant increase in uptake of the vaccination locally amongst older generations who had previously been resistant.
- During Ramadan, there was a lot of unwillingness to get vaccinated and local Muslim GPs played a role in encouraging vaccination and spreading the word that having the vaccine did not invalidate the fast and rates did pick up over the course of Ramadan.

What have we learned?

The amazing community response to the pandemic has shown us the importance of working together and demonstrated some key learning that should influence how we work in the future.

- What is clear is that our communities are in many cases acting for themselves, based on needs that they identify and experience first hand. They often do not require direction, ***we need to enable and support what is happening at neighbourhood level.***
- By working even more closely with our communities during the pandemic, strong relationships with community leaders and groups have been formed and existing relationships strengthened. ***It is key going forward that these bonds are maintained and cultivated and that collaboration continues.*** Collaboration with religious leaders has been integral to local vaccination programmes where rates were low and this can be harnessed for other public health areas that affect some of these groups disproportionately such as obesity and type 2 diabetes.

What have we learned?

- Experience from the COVID-19 vaccination programme is shaping the childhood vaccination programme in Nottingham. Initiatives are planned in more deprived areas and areas where English is not spoken as a first language. This includes provision of education in locally spoken languages and ongoing engagement of the local BAME community in the hope to improve childhood vaccination rates. Through the COVID-19 vaccination programme, we have seen success when we physically take the services to the community. ***We need to continue to cater for these more vulnerable groups through adaptation and mobilisation of services.***
- During the pandemic, NCVS found that their most critical unmet need was lack of easily available and understandable information for those who did not speak English as a first language. They are now more conscious of this and funding has been allocated for provision of resources for these groups. ***We need to be conscious of how information is presented and that it is accessible. For example through the use of graphics instead of words where possible.***
- ***We must ensure services are tailored to communities and shifting the model to what works for the population on a local level.*** For example, in the case of the Smoking Cessation in Pregnancy, the service has been adapted to suit the women's needs in the hope that smoking rates in pregnancy continue to fall.

The pandemic was a challenging time for us all. So much uncertainty. So much change. So much heartache and loss. But looking back on that period of time, we can feel proud. We achieved so much. As a city and as a community, we rallied. We came together. We worked to make the changes we could see were needed to provide for our vulnerable neighbours.

The networking and support from so many in the local community, particularly by volunteers, was overwhelming. It enabled local volunteer services to continue to support those who were even more lonely and isolated in the pandemic.

This series of case studies highlights some of the fantastic work that took place during the pandemic but is only a snapshot.

If you would like to get involved in volunteering in Nottingham, please visit <https://www.nottinghamcvs.co.uk> or if you are interested in becoming a community champion please visit [Community Champions – Health & Wellbeing Board \(healthynottingham.co.uk\)](http://healthynottingham.co.uk)

Thank you to Ghomaissa Rosie and Eisha Zahid for their work in preparing the report.