

Building a city-wide support network

Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council
City of Edinburgh

How a community umbrella body worked with local organisations and statutory bodies to form a city-wide network identifying need and supporting the health and wellbeing of communities.

“This partnership brings together the capacity, skills, knowledge, experience and trust within our communities to respond to this crisis.”



Ella Simpson, Chief
Executive, EVOC

What was the community need?

Many community groups and organisations in Edinburgh, being close to local people, very quickly recognised the health and wellbeing needs of their communities as a result of COVID-19. In response, they rapidly re-oriented their activities to support people directly within local communities, for example in meal production and providing transport.

Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council (EVOC) is well connected to the local third sector and to the local council. As a result, they were able to notice an element of ‘postcode lottery’ in the COVID-19 response. This meant that some areas of the city did not fall within the catchment of any community group and that some vulnerable people could be overlooked. EVOC identified needs for better coordination of community responses and for the management of referrals coming via the council or national helplines. This also aligned with the activity of City of Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) to provide outreach support to an identified vulnerable population.



Background to the community organisation

EVOC was established over 150 years ago, pre-NHS and welfare state and is the Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) for the City of Edinburgh. It also a partner in the [Edinburgh Third Sector Interface \(TSI\)](#) which is part of a national network of TSIs.

EVOC helps to support, develop and promote the interests and work of voluntary and community organisations in Edinburgh. With a deep understanding of the practice, priorities and pressures in communities, the voluntary sector and in the public sector, EVOC is skilled at building bridges between them to support productive and respectful planning and delivery.

They work to:

- provide services that enable voluntary sector organisations to thrive, and
- influence the statutory sector in the creation of conditions that will allow the voluntary sector to flourish.

Insights into how community groups/national organisations are responding to new community needs during COVID-19.



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How was this different?

EVOC worked closely with emerging and existing community groups across the city to coordinate and shape a rapidly developed city-wide response to COVID-19. This includes:

- food delivery (hot or chilled meals and/or food ingredients parcels),
- managing requests for volunteering (e.g. for shopping, dog walking, hearing aids) and,
- provision of practical and emotional support through primary care link worker.

The number of local organisations involved continues to grow with over 30 groups now part of the network.

The EVOC team coordinate referrals and have a key role in ensuring solutions are found for any identified gaps for example connecting with additional organisations, such as community transport and Volunteer Edinburgh.

EVOC have also been responsible for accessing and distributing funds, including from the local council and Scottish Government. This role allows continuity, improves coordination, and provides some central programme oversight in the dissemination of funds.

What was the response from the community?

“EVOC with the wider community projects are ideally placed to be our partners for this new network.... Joining with third sector organisations is so important as they are working in the heart of our communities and are best-placed to provide that essential support to reach those families who need it most.”

Cammy Day, Depute Lead, City of Edinburgh Council

Key insights:

Ella Simpson, Chief Executive, EVOC

“The third and community sector have been absolutely outstanding in their response to the needs of their communities. Organisations turned on a sixpence and made it happen, weeks before the formal response materialised.

This network, rooted in community, gives us real understanding of the most important emerging issues for people - food poverty is huge, there is an increase in anxiety, other mental health problems, and addiction issues, and there is enormous pressure on unpaid carers. Community organisations also need to think about the wellbeing of their own staff and volunteers which EVOC is supporting.

This approach has also shown the benefits of working in small, local community hubs, such as Caring in Craigmillar and Pilton Community Health Project. Some of this was organic and some EVOC facilitated. Key was that organisations already had local standing and were recognised as being able to deliver. These people and organisations are crucial, and they have grown in stature and confidence in their ability to just do things.

The realignment of the sector’s activity and lightening speed of response to emergent need is an example of my mantra - people, place, partnership and procurement - and offers a very strong basis to guard public health by ensuring that citizens are able to comply with guidance, stay at home and reduce community transmission.

The statutory sector has also shown that it can get money out quickly when they see a need, without spending months looking at papers. We should recognise the cooperative development by community and statutory sector colleagues as a clear example of how we can work together to develop new models of community support moving forward.”