

Supporting online connections:

Learning Disability Group of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire
(in partnership with Grampian Opportunities and AMS
Homemaker Services)

How a community group built capacity across its membership to stay
connected online during COVID-19



*“This was a good example of what
we can achieve when working
together to do things differently.”*

William Rae, Chairperson, Learning Disability
Group of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire

What was the community need?

COVID-19 and lockdown measures have had a significant impact on activity of many local groups and organisations. Many groups have adapted quickly by using technology to provide online support and opportunities.

The Learning Disability Group of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire (LDGA) was keen to organise virtual meetings in order to maintain the campaigning activity of the group. There was also concern that members would be at risk of social isolation if meetings stopped. However, as members were used to meeting in person, some potential barriers to involvement were identified for example confidence and skills to use technology and access to equipment.

The group came together with Grampian Opportunities and AMS Homemaker Services to explore the best way to support its members.



Background to the community organisation

The LDGA was set up to ensure that people with a learning disability are listened to. The group has 15 members who meet monthly with an aim of raising awareness of rights and improving local services through local campaigning activity.

Grampian Opportunities are a local community organisation focused on person centred support. They provide ongoing support to the LDGA to meet, develop skills and involve others.

AMS Homemaker Services are part of the North East Scotland Support and Wellbeing Cooperative that works to increase the variety of local flexible support options. They support LDGA by arranging for some members to attend meetings and other events.

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

How was this different?

The challenge was to build skills and confidence to encourage LDGA members to try different ways of connecting. The organisations worked together to provide support to each group member, taking time to understand anxieties and practice step-by-step processes.

Many issues were identified about connecting online which required support as caused frustration and could make people want to give up.

These included:

- anxiety about security issues
- following instructions around connecting
- feeling comfortable to contribute, and
- letting people know when you want to ask a question.

Meetings are running using Zoom with around six people joining each session. After each meeting, the group review what has worked and what could be learned and improved on for next time. For example, the chat function was creating challenge as it requires reading skills, so the group have decided to use the hand up function to ask questions.

Support has also been provided to apply to the Connecting Scotland fund for additional tablets to enable more members to join in activity in the future.

What was the response from the community?

"I have never done anything online before, Sylvia (support worker) came along and was there for the meetings, helping me connect and get more confident. I am going to be getting my own tablet so I can join in myself soon."

David Imray, Group Member

Key insights: Alastair Minty, volunteer fundraiser, Learning Disability Group Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire

"It took a coordinated effort and time from those involved to make this workable, the vast majority in people's own time. The organisations involved have a long history of working collaboratively and in a person-centred way. There was no issue of one organisation taking the lead, we worked on it as equals.

It was essential to understand the barriers for each individual member of the group and to give enough time and space to explore solutions that built confidence. We also looked at who was best placed in each organisation to support each person and ensured input was at a pace that suited that individual. It would have been easy to provide a generic solution but the time and effort working out the individual issues was well worth it. Moving forward it is important to hold this learning and to recognise the importance of allowing this time.

Group members have these skills and ways of connecting going forward and can use these to continue to improve connections and build resilience as a group. The group is keen to explore a different approach to meetings in the future with more of a mix of online and in person.

Feedback so far has suggested that our activity has helped address the considerable anxiety people felt by being online – however it is still a work in progress."

If you are interested in exploring something similar in your area or to find out more, please get in touch.

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Learning Disability Group
of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire

