



## Outcomes under COVID stories – Personal Outcomes Network

Alice McBride, Volunteer Development Officer for Engage Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire's Third Sector Interface (TSI).

### How have you been able to keep a focus on what matters to people during COVID?



I feel like what has mattered most to people is staying connected.

We very quickly realised that traditional volunteering would have to take a backseat during this time and focussed efforts on supporting organisations, community groups, and mutual aid groups that emerged to combat things like food provision and social isolation.

Our members were incredible in staying connected both with us and with their volunteer groups. Many volunteer groups were encouraged to keep in touch via digital means and weekly sessions were quickly organised to ensure the sense of community created through volunteering was maintained even if the work had to be suspended.

### What have you had to do differently and what made this possible?

Lockdown has accelerated a lot of digital plans we already had in the pipeline. We have hugely increased our social media presence as well as our digital platforms.

A big part of my work is connecting individuals interested in volunteering with organisations and opportunities. The huge increase in interest that we saw at the beginning of lockdown would have been unmanageable without our online recruitment platform. This platform allowed the majority to register and keep up to date with available roles quickly, without too many needless barriers. It also meant that I could work by phone or email with members of the community who are not digitally savvy, and meant we could still offer an inclusive service.

One element that differed slightly from our normal working was a truly co-ordinated response from ourselves as the TSI and the local council with regards to sharing information. We quickly identified active groups & organisations that would be able to support residents and offer volunteering opportunities and were very open in sharing information as widely as possible. We are fortunate to have some great colleagues in the council and local planning groups that recognise the positive outcomes attainable through collaboration and this made managing the huge interest in volunteering that much easier.

**What have you noticed that has been better?**

The ease with which people can access training, guidance, and/or funding advice from across the country. We have hosted sessions that have been accessed by groups far beyond our normal locality and we are in turn able to promote opportunities to our members that would normally be inaccessible due to travel costs or time commitments.

The speed with which groups have been able to identify a need, coordinate a response, and utilise volunteers' skills and knowledge to answer that need has also been amazing. There have been real success stories from around Renfrewshire of groups that have emerged in communities relatively disconnected until now. The sheer number of people willing to volunteer means there is a wealth of knowledge and skill that is being utilised and shared widely. This is obviously a benefit to everyone: the organisation, the volunteer group as a whole, and the individuals being helped.

**How did this make you feel?**

Very hopeful for increased collaboration in the future. I really believe in the power of shared knowledge and experience, so to see the very quick and proactive approach from within our own community and beyond was brilliant. I'm also hopeful that this is a turning point in how volunteering is perceived by other sectors and by the public. One of my goals through all my work is to challenge the misconceptions surrounding volunteering so that it may be more accessible and rewarding for the individual. We have received so much positive feedback from first time volunteers throughout this and that is very uplifting.

**What have you learned through this?**

That the third sector is a really adaptable sector that can respond quickly & compassionately in a crisis. And that it is a sector that is open to change & learning. I have heard of a lot of organisations that have decided to change their service model for good thanks to the lessons learnt so far.

We as an organisation also learnt to adapt quickly. We have seen first-hand the benefits of digital learning (increased availability of attendees, greater inclusion & better participation as learning is done in a more relaxed environment) and we are hoping to carry a lot of this thinking through in to our post-lockdown working.

**Anything else you want to tell us?**



We recognise that coming out of lockdown is likely going to be the hardest time for the charitable sector. Services and capacity will be seriously stretched due to increased need for help, and we are keen to encourage as many people as possible to continue their volunteering journey to support organisations. Volunteering doesn't only happen during a crisis and we welcome anyone who has been inspired to volunteer during this time to register with us and find out the great opportunities available in Renfrewshire.

You can do that here: [volunteer.engagerenfrewshire.com](https://volunteer.engagerenfrewshire.com)