

## Volunteer Loneliness: ideas on how volunteers can stay connected

Over the last year, we have increasingly heard of the cumulative impact that social isolation, due to Covid-19, has had on individuals, volunteers and voluntary sector organisations.

Prior to March 2020, a survey conducted by the charity Campaign to End Loneliness found that over nine million people in the UK said that they were always or often lonely. While there may be many causes of loneliness, we know that the changes to society as a result of Covid-19 will have a significant impact on many people.



Recent research conducted by the [What Works Centre for Wellbeing](#) found that volunteering is associated with enhanced wellbeing, both for individual volunteers and for communities as a whole. These findings support research by the NCVO in [Time Well Spent](#), which identified a sense of connection as key amongst the benefits people gained from volunteering. For most people, volunteering involved being with others, and the majority of those questioned (89%) said they valued meeting new people and that their volunteering helped them feel less isolated.

Volunteering can provide a sense of purpose and connectivity to the area that we live in, increases our well-being and self-confidence, improves our skills and buffers us from depression.

### Changes to volunteering

Recently, there have been significant challenges to the way people can and are able to volunteer. Many organisations have had to pause or adapt existing services, or develop new services and projects. Face to face volunteering has reduced, or stopped altogether, and there has been an increase in telephone and virtual volunteering from home.

For volunteers who have to pause or change their volunteering, whether through Covid-19 restrictions, changes in personal circumstances or other commitments, this can have a significant impact on personal wellbeing and social engagement. It is, therefore, vital that volunteers remain engaged and involved. For organisations, this may mean offering different ways of engaging and staying connected.

Read our blog, [Combatting Loneliness through Volunteering](#), to hear from three Marie Curie volunteers, who talk about how their volunteering has made them feel more connected to their local communities, more connected with others and has supported their service users to overcome loneliness.

## Do something different

**Volunteering from home** – there are some great opportunities out there to volunteer from home. Our [blog](#) back in March 2020 offered some ideas for home volunteering, ranging from acts of kindness to virtual fundraising.

**New opportunities for volunteering** – opportunities to get involved, meet with others and make a difference are slowly beginning to increase. Details of just some of the latest Volunteer roles available in North Yorkshire are available on our [Volunteering in North Yorkshire](#) (VINY) directory.

**Join a campaign and support your local volunteer organisations** – following and supporting a campaign that is connected to your previous volunteering role or even something completely different helps you to have a focus and connect with others in a different way. Choosing a local organisation with a cause that means something to you, will help you create better local connections and make you feel like you are making a difference locally. You can read more about volunteering locally in our [#DonateLocal blog](#).



Take a look at some of our [#DonateLocal](#) resources for ideas on how you can get involved.

**Engage with an online community** – while social media communities may be suitable for some, there are other online communities, such as [Kindness by Post](#), for those who are nervous about social media. [Action for Happiness](#) is an international movement exploring things we all can do to make ourselves and others happy and offers suggestions for random acts of kindness.

**Connect with your local community** – we have seen the impact of local during the pandemic and keeping up to date with local Facebook and community pages, or WhatsApp groups can be a great way to find out what's happening in your area. Community First Yorkshire runs training for volunteers on using the various social media platforms. Get in touch for further details or keep your eyes on [our events page](#).

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## Learn something new

**Training** - our [Community Gateway](#) offers details of training opportunities available to volunteers, with many training providers offering access to a wide range of free training including [Open University](#), [Future Learn](#) and [Reed](#). North Yorkshire County Council Adult Learning Skills have an [online portal](#) offering a wide range of courses, many of which are free to access. Courses range from Health and Wellbeing to digital skills and other skills based training.



**Online events** – taking part in online events can provide a sense of connection to others who share a similar interest and offer excellent learning opportunities. [Eventbrite](#) is just one of the platforms promoting free and low cost opportunities to get involved in events from home. There are a

number of online platforms where you can take part in activities and learn new skills such as the Royal Voluntary Service [Virtual Village Hall](#).

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## Get support

**Stay active and keep well** – there is strong scientific evidence that being physically active can lead to a healthier and happier life. There are some tips and resources on our [website](#) to help you stay active.

**Access wellbeing resources** – make sure you look after your own wellbeing and mental health. The British Red Cross have created a range of resources to help develop new skills to cope with loneliness, build confidence and connect. These resources are available free on their [website](#). Healthwatch North Yorkshire have a range of activities on their [website](#), which you can do from home too.

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In normal circumstances, volunteers make a significant contribution to their communities and providing voluntary and community services across the county. In the past extraordinary year, they have gone above and beyond and proved to be resilient, flexible in their volunteering and continued to be the backbone of their communities. They have been the recurrent thread of kindness within North Yorkshire.



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