

# Together4Dover – A Crisis Not Wasted

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It is perhaps hard to envisage a positive side to the Coronavirus Pandemic with all its implications for the ways we have had to live our lives in the context of rising death tolls across the world, the air of negativity that seemed to infect every news channel, together with the bad aspects of human behaviour witnessed by panic buying and hoarding, without regard to the needs of others, at the beginning of the lockdown. Yet there have been several positives during the crisis. Among them the desire to volunteer remained strong witnessed by the wealth of community groups and bands of volunteers which sprang up to support the vulnerable, key workers and the NHS. Much focus has been placed on Captain Sir Tom Moore, the centenarian who lifted the spirits of the country during the crisis with his positivism and optimism, as he raised a staggering amount for the NHS after setting out to raise a modest £1000 for NHS Charities Together. But his quiet selfless gesture has been replicated many times over by ordinary people proverbially rolling up their sleeves to help others. People seemed to respond to the quote, attributed to Winston Churchill “a crisis is a terrible thing to waste”! Many did not let the crisis go to waste for, as Coronavirus pressed the pause button on our lives and global society, some 7 million people emerged to support the NHS in a voluntary way and the volunteering spirit was more than evident in Dover.

At the start of the Covid19 emergency, a diverse group of 19 people representing Dover organisations came together at The Beacon Church Hall on March 19th to co-ordinate action in helping the vulnerable during the period of lockdown and out of such meeting came Together4Dover (T4D) under the umbrella of Dover Big Local. One of those who attended the meeting was a

local resident, Amanda Halstead, who had set up a Facebook page for volunteers to help people in Dover and she had recruited almost 1000 expressions of help.

Following the meeting a core team of eight people, including Amanda, worked hard to create an organisation to mobilise the many volunteers who offered to help support the most vulnerable people in Dover with deliveries and pickups. The organisational tasks included the putting together of Health and Safety and Safeguarding protocols, the acquisition of a VoIP phone number (a VoIP phone is a hardware or software-based telephone designed to use voice-over IP technology to send and receive phone calls over an IP network. An IP network is a communication network that uses Internet Protocol (IP) to send and receive messages between one or more computers), to connect requests to a single number to multiple volunteers, the creation of a website and a T4D Facebook page, the setting up of area responder teams, the preparation of ID cards for all Errand Volunteers, the acquisition of hand sanitizer and shopping bags and much more.

All volunteers were required to provide a character reference before undertaking any errands. Additionally, each Errand Volunteer was supplied with a pack including a personalised ID card (to be shown to a resident), high-viz vest, face masks and sanitiser gel. Both Errand and Helpline Volunteers were given guidelines of how each service worked and regular feedback was sought from volunteers to help with improving services. The core team worked closely with Dover District Council officers to ensure there was connectivity between T4D and Council systems so service users could be referred to

the appropriate level of support for their individual needs.

The T4D Helpline went live from 9am on Friday 3rd April and ran until it was suspended on August 1st (when shielding for most people ceased), during which time support for people (who resided in Alkham, in the areas of Dover at Aycliffe, Buckland, Clarendon, Elms Vale, Folkestone Road, The Linces, London Road, Maxton, Melbourne Avenue, St Radigunds, Tower Hamlets, as well as Capel, Elvington, Eythorne, Guston, Hougham, Kearsney, Lydden, River, Temple Ewell and Whitfield) who did not have family or neighbours to help them, was provided initially for shopping or collection of prescriptions. It was expected requests for help would be met within 24 hours. As weeks passed T4D evolved its systems to address the demands upon it and detailed flow charts were updated for both Errand and Helpline Volunteers while the scope of the operation expanded to include the provision of laundry facilities, free food delivery, hot meals and specialist counselling for people exhibiting mental health issues. More than 80 Dover residents volunteered either to man the helpline, run shopping and prescription errands or delivering hot meals and fresh food. Support also came from local companies with Dover Marina Hotel cooking the hot meals, Buckland Media supplying all the printing for the fliers circulated by T4D volunteers,



*Dover Marina Hotel Staff - Food Parcels for T4D*

Drop N Go offering laundry services, the Saga Group providing driver volunteers plus staff to help with website production while the phone system was kindly donated by the Dial9 group. Surplus food was donated by local supermarkets including Aldi, Morrisons, Tesco and Marks & Spencer. Tesco donated 1,500 carrier bags and Aldi donated hand sanitiser for volunteers.

16 representatives of those who had attended the March meeting came together in a Zoom meeting on June 23rd to review progress when Lynn Harris, T4D volunteer administrator, was able to report T4D had received by then 937 helpline calls with 490 errands undertaken. Of 63 active volunteers over half ran errands. 671 hot meals had been delivered to local people, 39 families were receiving Fareshare food support and 5 people had received laundry support. A new website was in place and two active Facebook groups existed. Three batches of fliers had been printed and distributed to residents over the area of operation. A grant had been received from Dover District Council, which had enhanced services, while Dover Big Local gave additional funding for administration costs.

When lockdown restrictions eased T4D core team decided that, with effect from Monday 13th July, the time to complete errands should be extended to 48 hours mainly because fewer volunteers were available to undertake errands. When the operation was suspended on August 1st particular care was taken to ensure that regular callers could be supported beyond July 31st by signposting to another service where possible. At the time of suspension the core team offered grateful thanks to all organisations and volunteers who rose to meet the challenge of extraordinary times. T4D reported it had been overwhelmed by the support of volunteers with many going above and beyond the call of duty in completing

errands. People showed just how deeply they cared about Dover's community. T4D had worked closely with Dover District Council's Community Development Team, Community Wardens, and the local NHS Social Prescriber all of which proved invaluable in creating successful connectivity across the parties.

Taking into account the short lead in times involved to set up the operation T4D's success is measured by the fact volunteers completed around 600 errands, over 1,300 phone calls were received while nearly 800 hot meals had been delivered plus over 800 food deliveries all of which was for the benefit of those who had no family or friends to undertake tasks on their behalf.

While now suspended, it must be acknowledged the T4D initiative was a resounding success with firm foundations laid to reinstate a service should it prove necessary. Certainly, it is in Dover's interests, especially the interests of the vulnerable, to maintain the cohesion and momentum gained by T4D. It provided such a positive response to the pandemic that the experience gained will be vital should a second wave of the virus strike. It will also enable the organisation to respond to any other similar crisis. T4D built an excellent precedent of organisations working collaboratively together in the interests of the common good. All involved share a willingness to maintain the ethos and structure created which should be applauded. T4D was nominated, along with other charities, for its outstanding contribution to the local community during lockdown and was chosen as the winner by the Chair of Kent County Council. At the time of writing a ceremony is being planned where the Chair of Kent County Council, The High Sheriff and The Lord Lieutenant of Kent will meet with representatives of T4D.

This was a collective response that certainly did not let a crisis go to waste! Well done everyone involved in this wonderful example of the spirit of volunteer activism in Dover and congratulations on the well-deserved official recognition of the operation's success.

*Having been singled out as an outstanding achievement to the community a Thank You Presentation was held on Monday 28th September, virtually through Microsoft Teams, when Together4Dover received warm words of appreciation from the Lord Lieutenant of Kent (the Lady Colgrain), the High Sheriff of Kent (Mrs Remony Millwater), the Chairman of Kent County Council (Councillor Graham Gibbens), the Chairman of Dover District Council (Councillor Michael Connolly), the Town Mayor of Dover (Councillor Gordon Cowan) and District Councillor Nigel Collor (the appropriate Portfolio Holder from Dover District Council).*

*Some of the volunteers from T4D gave a description of their experiences during the 2020 unprecedented period of lockdown and all the dignitaries praised the voluntary efforts made by all who had created the organisation and especially the volunteers who worked so hard to deliver food or collect prescriptions or undertook other tasks. Dover's Town Mayor, in a heartfelt address, said it was the "greatest honour" to pay a tribute in the presentation that recognised the love and community spirit created by T4D. He indicated they provided a lifeline for the most vulnerable citizens of Dover and praised the selflessness of all involved in the "amazing story" that demonstrated the community values of Dover. He further observed that all the volunteers gave their own time freely and were not paid, not because they had no value but because, as volunteers, "they are priceless". What better tribute than that can be given?*

*Editor*