

COMMUNITIES IN THE TIME OF COVID

IN THE SIX MONTHS FROM MARCH TO SEPTEMBER 2020,
75 DTAS MEMBERS...



Supported
80,289 people
in their
communities



Distributed
204,205
deliveries,
including food
parcels,
prescriptions and
many more



Formed
partnerships
with **974**
organisations



Worked with
3,636 volunteers,
1,973 of them
new volunteers



Covered
345,934 miles
to deliver
support where
it's been
needed

“ We're so proud of the way our community has come together, it has shown us that the community spirit we work so hard to keep alive is thriving. Everyone stepped up to this challenge through one of the most difficult times in our lives and put their community first. ”

Development Trust Worker

Our members have been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic to keep their communities ticking over and to protect their most vulnerable neighbours. Of the 160 members who undertook Covid-response work, just under half (75) completed our survey seeking to capture and quantify the difference they've made in just six unpredictable and unprecedented months. An army of volunteers and staff have provided vital, often life-saving, support to over 80,000 people, delivering upwards of 200,000 parcels, and covering a distance of 345,000 miles – equivalent to 14 full laps of the equator!

How did they do it?

Trusts attributed their adaptation and responsiveness to three critical success factors: flexibility and expert local knowledge at ground-level to distribute resources where they were needed and with light-touch regulation; strong and co-ordinated partnerships across the third sector, local business, local government, and beyond, to deliver effective and efficient responses; and the tireless effort and dedication of staff and volunteers.

Trusts' local knowledge and expertise allowed them to mobilise quickly, and to direct support to the neighbourhoods, groups and households that needed it. This data was held not on computers, but in local peoples' heads with concerns for their neighbours and their community. Nor was their work a one-way street: as familiar, trusted organisations, trusts were a first port of call for those individuals and families in need. For many, the pandemic was the first time they had been in such a situation, and they had no prior knowledge of local services. The strong reputation, recognition and credibility that trusts had within their communities drew vulnerable individuals to them who would otherwise have not known where to turn.

Strong partnerships, and clear communication across them, helped to avoid duplication, waste and gaps in support. This ensured that resources were used appropriately and effectively, and that support, staffing and resources were evenly distributed. We heard of improved relationships between trusts and local authorities, including an improved mutual-understanding of one another's roles and purposes, and the potential complementarity between both organisations.

The dedication of staff and local volunteers was remarked upon almost universally. Respondents consistently reported that their personal links to the community drove a tireless commitment to

These numbers go some way towards quantifying the enormous impact and tireless commitment of our members, but no numbers can fully capture the personal difference that trusts have made during some of the hardest times in people's lives. Community anchor organisations, their staff and volunteers have been a lifeline for tens of thousands, offering everything from food parcels to company.

They have done so out of conviction and community spirit, at a time when trusts have lost an average £32,000 of earned income in just six months. Many now face a perilous future; having worked steadily for years, investing to build capacity and generate income, many now find themselves without any earnings, and some are having to rapidly diversify into new operations.

However, our members now enjoy a newfound recognition within their communities (as this research shows) as well as from policymakers and journalists. As we begin to emerge from the pandemic, there is an essential opportunity to establish stronger and more resilient communities, and to build an economy and public services that work for everyone. There will be a vital role for development trusts and community anchors to play in this recovery, and a number have already seized the initiative in their local areas.

Development trusts have been practicing community wealth-building for decades, and nobody is better placed to lead on this as the agenda enters the mainstream. Community anchor organisations will have a central role to play in building a fair, resilient and inclusive recovery, as well as in the successful roll-out of the Scottish Government's 20-minute neighbourhoods.

In these unprecedented times, DTAS has been immensely proud of our members' response and how they have stepped up to the challenge with determination and aplomb. It has been an immense honour for us at DTAS to have helped to support these activities, whether by distributing funds, offering advice, or just being a friendly face. It is hugely heartening to hear from members how much of a difference we have been able to make, and looking to the future with cautious optimism, we look forward to building on their revitalised purpose and strengthened partnerships as recognised community anchor organisations.

Louisa Macdonell
Chief Executive, DTAS

-serving local needs. The dedication of staff and local volunteers was remarked upon almost universally. Respondents consistently reported that their personal links to the community drove a tireless commitment to serving local needs. In many areas, trusts, staff and volunteers seized the initiative, pouring their time, resources and even money into a local response. Especially in large, rural areas, some local councils were slow to mobilise, so trusts took matters into their own hands; at least one trust had begun distributing food parcels even before they had been approved for the funding to do so.

Only as strong as the weakest link

Local trusts played a vital, indispensable role in the 'chain' of Covid-response work. This included redistributing funds to hyper-local, often unconstituted groups who would be otherwise ineligible for public funds, directing willing volunteers to the local organisations that needed the manpower, and signposting those individuals in need to local services. This vital role as a community anchor included vertical linkages between high-level administrative bodies and local groups at 'ground-level', and lateral linkages between local organisations, volunteers and service-users. Especially in larger rural areas where the local authority was headquartered far from the communities in question, community anchors played an indispensable role in filtering support down to where it was needed on the basis of local knowledge.

Within this chain, there was also an acknowledgement from trusts of the vital role of intermediary organisations, like DTAS, in providing advice and support and distributing concrete funds and resources in a quick, efficient and light touch manner. Given their expertise and pre-existing relationships with the trusts, DTAS could vouch for these organisations and ensure that resources were allocated quickly and without complicated applications or onerous reporting requirements.

A proud legacy

A number of trusts have reported a revitalised role and reputation in their communities. The quality of response they have provided, the new clients they have served, and their vital work distributing funds and volunteers to partner organisations have combined to reassert their local importance and recognition. One respondent described the pandemic as a 'turning point' where they are no longer seen as a group of volunteers, but a professional organisation. Another trust, established only 3 years ago, reported now being routinely referred to as an "established" organisation and widely regarded as a local anchor.

Looking to the future

Trusts reported that Covid-19 will continue to shape their operations into the future: trusts plan to work to sustain and retain new services, volunteers and clients; they are more assured of their organisational abilities and capacities, and unafraid of tackling new challenges; and many are taking a proactive approach to leading a resilient local recovery. A number have already taken action to create local jobs, design new services to tackle hunger, isolation and rising youth unemployment, and to drive forward town-centre regeneration. Where they may have once been side-lined in local planning in favour of more financially-powerful groups or organisations, they are now regarded as an authoritative and insightful voice, with a unique and valuable perspective that surpasses the purely financial, to understand and meet local needs.