



Rural Wisdom How the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way communities can support each other.



Rural Wisdom is a project for older people in Scotland and Wales which aimed to reduce social isolation and loneliness through community development and volunteering led by older people in these locations.

In Wales, Rural Wisdom worked in Leeswood and Pontblyddyn, Holywell, Milford Haven, and the Dale Peninsula. Between 2017 and February 2020, the Welsh Development Workers worked in their communities, supported by informal volunteers.

These volunteers were not formally part of Volunteering Matters Cymru but were supported by the organisation and Rural Wisdom to take charge of activities in their local area and lead change in their communities. In North Wales (Leeswood and Pontblyddyn, Holywell), this led to the creation of the Sunshine Community Café in a local community centre and a monthly intergenerational lunch at a local primary school in Leeswood and Pontblyddyn; and a community garden at Holway Hub House in Holywell.

Sunshine Community Cafe and lunch club



Community Garden at Holway Hub House

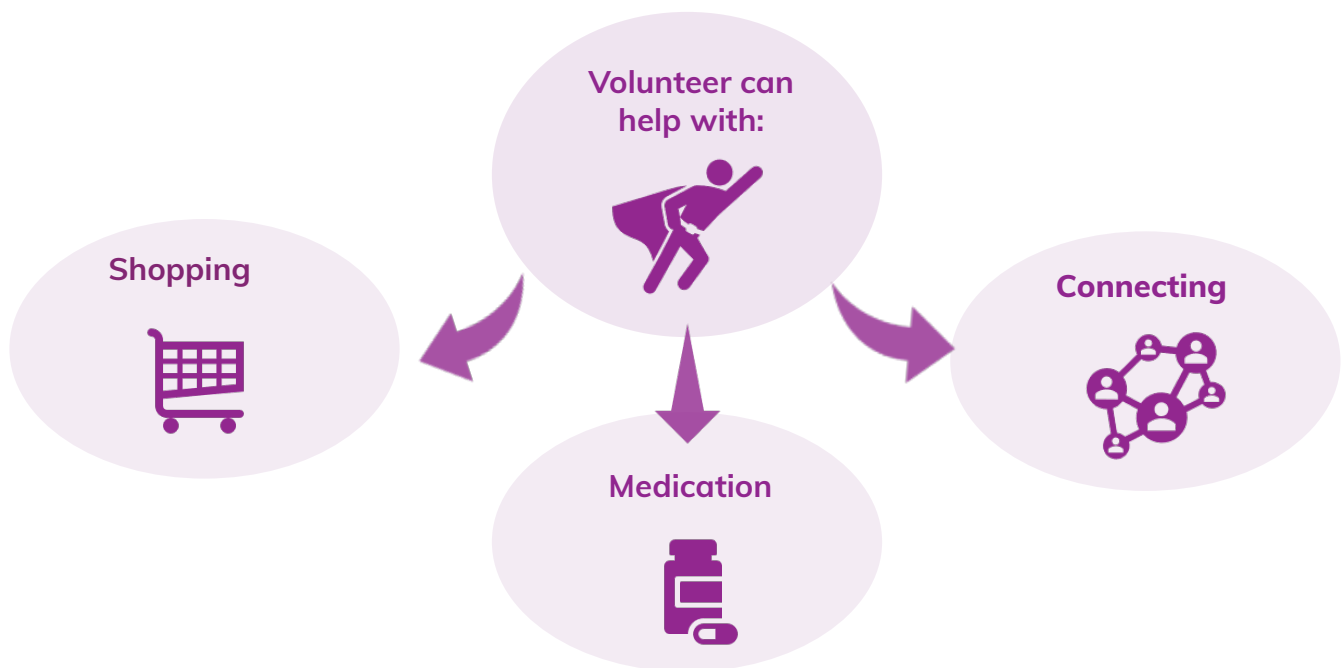


Volunteering Matters Volunteers

When the COVID-19 Pandemic hit the UK in March 2020, the work Rural Wisdom and its volunteers had been doing in local communities had to come to a halt. But the presence of the project and its people did not cease. The Newport Response Model was quickly rolled out, with the networks created by earlier work utilised to share information and connect people who needed support with those who could provide it. Additionally, several informal community volunteers decided to become Volunteering Matters Volunteers at this time. Formalising their role, provided the volunteers and their local communities with the support, safety, and security that Volunteering Matters offers.

The relationships Rural Wisdom and the community volunteers had created prior to the pandemic, alongside the formalising of the volunteers' roles, ensured a high level of trust, reassurance, and continuity in their pandemic response work. People in the communities felt safe that the volunteer helping them was known and already trusted in their community.

This meant that people were able to receive weekly shopping, much needed medication and have someone to talk to over the phone on a regular basis. A lot of this support has been consistently in place since the start of the pandemic, with matched pairs supporting each other for the last 18 months. It is hoped that these relationships will continue, formally, for as long as they are needed, and indefinitely on an informal basis.



Conclusion

This change in how communities can support one another, which would not have come about on this scale without the pandemic, means that Rural Wisdom has been able to continue preventing social isolation and loneliness in rural communities throughout the pandemic. The consistent, relationship based support provided in North Wales, has made a huge difference to those receiving support and built connections in communities that would not have been there otherwise.

In the first stage of Rural Wisdom, Development Workers worked closely with older people and their communities to identify and address the key issues, achieve the project outcomes and create sustainable change. In Stage 2, Development Workers introduced Rural Wisdom to new, rural communities in Wales and Scotland applying the learning from Stage 1 to address local priorities and achieve the same overarching project outcomes.

Scotland: Stage 1 Eaglesham, Highland Perthshire, North Angus
Stage 2 Moray Scottish Borders
Wales: Stage 1 Leeswood & Pontblyddyn, Milford Haven
Stage 2 Holywell and Dale Peninsula

Evaluation Contact

Dr Victoria Mason-Angelow
Research and Evaluation Consultant
Victoria.Mason-Angelow@ndti.org.uk

National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi)
www.ndti.org.uk

Resources

Find more information and resources at:
www.ruralwisdom.org

