Good Neighbours Scheme Toolkit

This toolkit is designed as a starting point, not a strict rulebook.
Every community is unique, so please feel free to adapt, change, and tailor these resources to best suit the specific needs, personality, and structure of your local community.

Contents

Introduction

What is a Good Neighbours Scheme?

Good Neighbours Schemes are community run initiatives linking people who are in particular need, with community volunteers who are willing to help.

Good Neighbours Schemes can help to reduce feelings of loneliness and build social networks, creating an environment where people feel safe and secure because they have a genuine connection with each other. It's about local people helping their neighbours to enjoy a better quality of life.

Help is given to those in need free of charge, although a reasonable mileage charge is usually made for providing transport and volunteer transport costs.

Schemes are coordinated by phone, usually a mobile which can be held in turn by a core group of volunteer 'Duty Officers'. A duty period is usually one week but can vary based on the time people have to offer.

Anyone who needs help can call the mobile number and speak to the duty officer, who will locate a suitable volunteer available to provide the help requested.

Good Neighbours Schemes help to build local connections which can also be useful in an emergency, such as extreme weather events. Volunteers will be aware of residents who may need additional support or reassurance and may also choose to get involved in developing a Community Emergency Plan.

This toolkit will help you to: build local interest; recruit volunteers; and understand what's needed to run a successful Scheme.

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What help can a Scheme provide?

A Good Neighbours Scheme is for the benefit of the whole community, although it tends to be older residents who make most use of the help available. Volunteers are encouraged to offer their services only for activities they feel happy and confident to carry out.

Transport
This is offered by many schemes, with volunteers giving people occasional lifts in their own car, for example to a hospital or GP appointment. This is the only service for which we recommend a charge be made of up to 45 pence per mile, to compensate the driver for fuel, wear and tear.

In Cumbria many villages have voluntary car schemes, and we would encourage people to use these in the first instance. If there isn't a voluntary car scheme in your area a Good Neighbours Scheme can offer lifts.

Practical help
Practical help such as shopping; collecting pensions or prescriptions; occasional cooking; and meal delivery are also in demand. Volunteers could also help when someone is temporarily unable to walk their dog.

Household repairs
Help with changing a light bulb; fixing a dripping tap; checking a smoke alarm; minor electrical repairs; moving furniture; or hanging a picture could all be included, if appropriate skills are available.

Gardening
Schemes can offer a one-off tidy up for a villager who is perhaps embarrassed by the state of their garden and physically unable to manage it themselves.

Befriending
Befriending on a regular basis is another extremely welcome and worthwhile practice which can benefit older residents, those newly bereaved, and people new to the village.

Letter writing and form filling
These can also be a challenge for people, for various reasons, and help may be appreciated. and able to do and that no one will be expected to be available all of the time.

Starting up a Scheme

Setting up a committee

As with most projects, a small group is needed to get things started and oversee the running of the Scheme. ACT can provide a template Constitution. Members of this Committee may also choose to be one of the Duty Officers, responsible for the day to day coordination, or Volunteers providing support to those who request it.

Identifying need and volunteers

The first thing to do is to find out if people are interested in having a Scheme in your area. Promoting the idea in local newsletters, speaking to people at events and holding a public meeting are good ways to do this.

ACT can provide a simple community questionnaire to help identify:

- How many people might benefit and the types of tasks they need help with.
- How many people might volunteer and the types of tasks they can help with.

Collecting surveys by hand helps ensure the best response rate; one community found 60 volunteers in a village of 550 people.

Questions can also be included as part of a more general community survey, perhaps for a Community / Neighbourhood Plan. These are often anonymous so include a tear off sheet for volunteers to give their details.

Reassure volunteers that they will only be asked to carry out tasks they feel confident and able to do and that no one will be expected to be available all of the time.

Open Meeting

Following your initial survey, assess the level of need demonstrated, and note if there are sufficient volunteers for each type of service.

Invite everyone who responded, plus other stakeholders (local councillors, community groups, sheltered accommodation and GP surgery staff etc.) to an open meeting to discuss how the scheme will work.

Make it clear that volunteers are not expected to do everything or be available at all times. Many Good Neighbours Schemes rely on recently retired people who are free during the day, when older or more vulnerable residents are most likely to need help. However, stay flexible and encourage anyone to offer whatever time they can.

An informal meeting at this stage is an opportunity to discuss what it means to be a volunteer, complete Volunteer Forms, provide Volunteer Information Packs and answer any questions people might have.

Start-up Costs

There are a few things you may need to pay for, in order to start your Good Neighbours Scheme:

- Mobile Phone (purchase of handset and contract/pay as you go)
- Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for volunteers
- Insurance
- Stationery / publicity
- Promotional materials

Sources of Funding

There are several potential sources of funding to help set up a scheme and ACT can help you decide how to approach them.

- Cumbria Community Foundation: various small grants programmes. www.cumbriafoundation.org
- Awards for All (England): Set up to fund small projects that involve people in their community.

  https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/
- Local authorities and Parish / Town Councils may also be able to provide funding.

Once a scheme has started your aim should be to ensure its self-sustaining. Local fundraising events such as a bring-and-buy sale or coffee mornings can raise sufficient funds to cover the ongoing costs of insurance, mobile phone, and DBS checks for new volunteers.

Vetting Procedures (DBS checks)

ACT recommends that all volunteers, including Duty Officers and the Committee, complete appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

Although not all activities carried out by Good Neighbours volunteers can be defined as ‘regulated’ some are (such as driving someone to a doctor’s appointment, or shopping on their behalf) and checks are a legal requirement. Many insurers also require these checks to be undertaken.

DBS checks can be a sensitive issue, and some may feel such checks are “over the top” for a small scheme where volunteers are offering their services out of the goodness of their hearts. But volunteers may be going into vulnerable people’s homes as strangers, perhaps handling shopping money. Having a check builds confidence in the scheme and in the volunteers themselves.

Your Good Neighbours Scheme committee will need to be set up with an agreed constitution, chair, secretary and treasurer before you can request DBS checks on potential volunteers. ACT can advise where to have the check procedures carried out.

The time taken to prepare a DBS check is usually around three weeks but could take longer if a volunteer has moved home a number of times within the past five years.

In the case of a trouble-free check this will simply state that there is ‘nothing recorded’ in terms of criminal offences.

If the person has a criminal record, the offence(s) may be shown if recent or significant. Minor offences committed many years ago may not show up.

The DBS check is returned to the volunteer applicant and then all that is required is to have sight of the DBS check statement. The volunteer can then register online using their reference number so they can use the check with other volunteering work that they might undertake. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disclosure-application-process-for-volunteers/disclosure-application-process-for-volunteers

Insurance

Public liability insurance is essential for a


Photo: Shropshire RCC

Good Neighbours Scheme since it guards against a claim for accidental damage or personal injury caused by a volunteer.

Each scheme is free to source insurance from wherever it chooses but we recommend you obtain several quotes and compare the cover and costs before making a decision.

You may also want to consider Group Personal Accident insurance, which covers volunteers against the risk of injury in the course of volunteering.

Possible insurance providers:

- Norris & Fisher: www.norrisandfisher.com
- WRS Insurance Ltd: www.wrsinsurance.co.uk
- Zurich Insurance UK: www.zurich.co.uk/en/charity-insurance

Setting up a Bank account

Setting up a community bank account is quite straight forward and is essential to help keep the scheme's books in order. A bank account of this type will usually offer free banking.

It is normal practice for cheques to require two signatories from the committee. All appointed signatories need to provide identification when opening the account.

CAF Bank (Charities Aid Foundation), The Cooperative Bank, Virgin Money and NatWest offer bank accounts for community groups. Be sure to check that if there are any banking charges.

Processes and Procedures

It's important from the outset to have appropriate processes and procedures in place, to ensure the smooth running of the scheme and protect everyone involved. ACT can provide template documents to help.

For example, each Good Neighbours Scheme will collect personal information about volunteers and individuals requesting help; it's important that this information is kept securely. Consider the following:

- Equal Opportunities
- Confidentiality and Data Protection
- Health and Safety
- Safeguarding

It's a good idea to include details of these in a Volunteer Information Pack, as well as practical information about how the scheme operates and other useful local information.

Support available from ACT

- Guidance to help understand what's involved in setting up a scheme
- Help with initial meetings and template documents, to get things started.
- Provide a link between Good Neighbours Schemes and statutory bodies or other voluntary organisations.
- Links with any other Good Neighbours Schemes in the county, to share ideas, and discuss solutions to common problems and best practice.
- Provide ongoing support as required.

Contact ACT on Tel: 01768 425666 or Email: info@cumbriaaction.org.uk

Guidelines for Volunteers

Helping you help your community

Volunteering as a ‘Good Neighbour’ is a highly rewarding activity because it:

- Benefits individual volunteers, helping them to feel useful, valued, and appreciated.
- Benefits the client of the scheme, helping improve their quality of life.
- Benefits wider society by encouraging others to become increasingly socially responsible and caring.

As a volunteer you may often need to go unaccompanied into a client’s house or to take them in your car. These volunteer guidelines have been written to help encourage safe and enjoyable volunteering, but are not intended to be a comprehensive list of do’s and don’ts.

Once you have read the guidelines, please keep them in a safe place for future reference. If you experience problems as a volunteer, contact the Duty Officer on call.

Risk Assessment

It is unlikely that you will encounter any serious problems while volunteering, but it is common sense to be alert to any potential risks or hazards. Because it is impossible to train you for all eventualities we ask that you do your own risk assessment before you start every task.

This doesn’t mean filling in forms, but thinking logically and carefully about what you are embarking on. For example before changing a light bulb check that the step, stool or ladder is securely positioned, i.e. use your common sense.

Working outside / doing odd jobs

Please make sure you know how to operate any equipment or machinery correctly. Do not use any equipment that appears to be dangerous and report it to the Duty Officer.

- Make sure you wear appropriate clothing such as safety goggles, boots and gloves.

bleach or cleaning liquids. Wear protective gloves and always wash your hands afterwards.

Accidents

If you have an accident during the course of volunteering you must inform your Duty Officer in writing immediately. If you are injured or feel unwell see your doctor. He or she will be able to provide an independent record of any injury.

Providing the injury was not caused through your own negligence you may be able to make a claim through the Scheme's insurance policy.

If the accident is serious and you are not happy with the response from the Scheme you can contact the Health and Safety Executive:
https://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/index.htm

Driving and providing lifts

Please make sure your car is in roadworthy condition, correctly taxed and insured, with a current MOT certificate.

Volunteer driving should not increase your car insurance premium but you need to inform them. You can use our template letter available to inform your insurance company, if you need to.

- Make sure you are clear about where you are taking the client and any fee which has been agreed, to cover mileage costs.
- Before taking the task, agree with the Duty Officer whether or not you're required to wait during the client's appointment.
- Take your mobile phone with you if you have one.
- Make sure that you have plenty of fuel before starting a journey
- Make sure that you and your passenger are wearing seat belts.
- Park in a designated parking space or zone, pay a parking fee if required and keep the ticket / receipt to be reimbursed
- Make a record of the mileage for each journey in order to claim your mileage allowance (up to 45p per mile).
- Place any payment given to you by the client in a sealed envelope with details of the journey and pass to the Duty Officer.
- Be sure to notify the duty officer when you have completed the journey.
- Make regular checks on tyres, lights, seatbelts, windscreen wipers and engine coolant levels. A professional mechanic should make regular checks on your car's brakes and steering.

Working with people / home visits

Please make sure you know all the details about the task being requested before you accept the job. Be sure you know what will be expected of you by the client. Make a note of the client's address, phone number, and directions if needed.

- When home visiting always show your identity card.
- Explain clearly who you are and why you have come. The Duty Officer will have told the client who to expect.
- The Duty Officer should always know where you are, so if you have a mobile phone take it with you.
- If you feel nervous, ask the Duty Officer if you can be accompanied by another volunteer on your first visit.
- Always request that the client makes future requests through the scheme's central Helpline number. Don't give your personal phone number or address to clients.
- Do not accept inappropriate behaviour (comments or physical contact) and report any incidents to the Duty Officer.
- Avoid being alone in the house with a client, unless you feel comfortable to do so. Leave if you feel unsafe. If you feel uncomfortable ask your Duty Officer not to send you there again and say why. If you are concerned about a client always tell your Duty Officer.
- If a client has a fall while you are there and is unable to get up, do not attempt to lift or move them. Make the client as comfortable as possible and call 999.

Duty Officers Call Guidelines

- Phone your Duty Officer to let them know when you have completed a job.

Privacy and Confidentiality

It’s important to respect the privacy of clients at all times, unless there is a clear safeguarding issue. It is vital that clients trust and respect the Scheme and the Volunteers. Read the Scheme’s data protection policy.

It’s the Duty Officer’s role to take calls from local people requesting help and coordinate with volunteers to carry out the tasks.

On taking a call:

- Always have a pen, paper and GN Scheme information with the phone.
- Repeat and write down the name, address and phone number of the caller. Also get clear directions.
- If you are unsure of the suitability of a request say you will discuss it with the committee and ring the caller back.
- Don’t be afraid to say “No, it’s not our remit”, but refer the caller to other agencies such as Social Services.
- Always try to leave a caller with a positive feeling about the scheme. Explain what the scheme does and if it can’t help, say why.
- When arranging lifts discuss any mileage charge and payment arrangements with the client.

On telephoning a volunteer:

- Be friendly, cheerful, optimistic and encouraging. Keep smiling (unless it is inappropriate) because your smile will be reflected in your voice.
- Be clear about the task to be done.
- Every volunteer has the right to say “No, I’m not available”. Accept a refusal cheerfully so that you can ask again in the future. Note that they were called.
- Don’t put too big a responsibility on the volunteer. Try to break a complex request into manageable tasks.
- Don’t give out details about the caller until

Useful phone numbers

There may be times when you receive a request that cannot be handled by the scheme. The duty officer needs to use his / her judgement as to whether to contact a statutory body or another organisation.

There are lots of organisations (local and national) offering specialist support and advice. It is a good idea to create a list of useful contacts that you can refer to, if your clients request advice or support that is outside of the remit or capacity of your Good Neighbours Scheme. These organisations usually include local Age UK organisations, Carers Support, local MIND groups, to name a few.

Remember, any safeguarding concerns must be reported immediately.

Reporting a Safeguarding Concern in Cumbria

Concerns about a Child

- Cumberland Safeguarding Children

Partnership Tel: 0333 2401727

- Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership Tel: 0300 373 2724

Concern about an Adult?

- Cumberland Council Tel: 0300 373 3732
- Westmorland and Furness Council Tel: 0300 373 3301

If you feel a person is in immediate danger, call the police on 999

Is there any money to help us get started?

ACT can suggest sources of finance for start up grants to cover start-up costs such as: insurance, DBS checks, mobile phone and its initial running costs, plus stationery and publicity.

Once a scheme is up and running it needs to be sustainable and self-funding through fundraising or sourcing other grants. Schemes that have proved their worth in a community are often supported by the parish Council for their basic running costs of insurance and a mobile phone.

Would being a volunteer driver increase insurance premiums?

The short answer is that it shouldn't. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) forged an agreement during the Miners' Strike in 1984 that volunteer driving would not incur a premium increase. This was because drivers were ferrying colleagues as flying pickets.

Volunteer driving is treated as giving a friend a lift. However not all insurance companies agree to this at present, so we recommend that all volunteer drivers send their insurance companies a letter asking them to confirm that they are covered for this activity. A template letter can be provided.

Giving a lift is the only Good Neighbours Scheme service which is likely to involve money. The client is invited to make a contribution of up to 45 pence per mile to compensate the driver for running costs, based on the mileage from the driver's home and back again.

The rate is set by the committee but must not go above the 45p per mile threshold. Government has agreed that this is a non taxable sum. If volunteers received more than the recommended 45p per mile they would have to declare this on their tax return.

Drivers are encouraged to claim all expenses but are welcome to donate any unwanted reimbursements back to the Scheme.

Why do volunteers need DBS checks?

Government expects that anyone who comes into contact with vulnerable adults or children through the course of their volunteering work, must have a DBS check.

Many of the jobs done by volunteers in Good Neighbours Schemes are classed as regulated activity and therefore checks become mandatory. Some insurers are now including DBS checks in their conditions.

We consider the checks to be a positive step, helping to build confidence in the scheme. Put yourself in the shoes of someone living a hundred miles away from their elderly relative. You would want some reassurance about the person going into your relative's home to help them.

ACT can advise on where to get a DBS check. The DBS waives its charge for checking volunteers, however there are schemes to administer a check before you submit it which charge around £30 each.

What does the Scheme Committee do and how many meetings does it take to get to the point of launch?

The Committee is responsible for setting up and overseeing the running of the Good Neighbours Scheme. It agrees a Constitution, based on a model used by other Good Neighbours Schemes, and organises:

Additional Ideas & Information

- Opening a bank account to put the grant money and any fundraising / donations in.
- Public Liability insurance and possibly Group Personal Accident insurance
- DBS checks for volunteers
- A mobile phone for the Helpline
- Launch and ongoing promotion

It can take up to four meetings before the Scheme is ready to launch but this will vary from one community to the next. It's a good idea to trial the scheme for a few weeks before launch to ensure everything is running smoothly.

Newcomers Welcome Pack

When newcomers move into a village they can feel isolated and may have little idea about the availability of local services, clubs and societies.

A Good Neighbours Scheme can help to welcome people when they move in, encouraging them to become more involved in community activities, perhaps even volunteering for the Scheme!

First check that your Parish Council or local WI don't already produce a Welcome Pack. (If they do, ensure details of the Good Neighbours Scheme is included!)

A Welcome Pack for new newcomers to the village could include:

- A letter of welcome
- General information about the village
- A directory of useful phone numbers and local services / clubs
- A copy of your Good Neighbours Scheme

- Regional tourist information
- Local Council details
- An invitation to a get-together
- A map of the parish / district

Helping in an Emergency

Good Neighbours Schemes help to build better connected communities where residents who may be most at risk in an emergency are known about and can be better supported. Schemes can utilise their existing volunteer network and knowledge of the community to help prepare and respond.

Volunteers will be aware of residents who may need additional support or reassurance, and some schemes have already drawn up plans to check on isolated people in bad weather and deliver hot food, shopping etc.

Often it is the Parish Council who lead on a Community Emergency Plan, which sets out what local people can do in an emergency to help each other and the emergency services. In areas where there is also a Good Neighbours Scheme it makes sense to work together.

A Good Neighbours Scheme could also:

- Ensure each Volunteer has a working torch, a battery-powered / wind-up radio, some method of heating food and boiling water, a thermos flask, plus some standby tinned or dried food.
- Encourage clients to be prepared and plan for what they would do in an emergency.
- Work with other local groups, for example to receive First Aid training or make plans for the village hall or church to be used as a 'Place of Safety' if needed.
- Consider how you would communicate in the event of a power failure of if phone lines are down.

Marketing Tips

There are a number of ways you can promote your Good Neighbour Scheme to potential volunteers and clients which don't require lots of time or money. However, there's no 'silver bullet' and the key to effective communications is to use all of the tools as often as you can.

Studies show that on average a person must see a message five to seven times before they retain the information and may need to see it ten times before they act on it. Essentially - if at first you don't succeed, then try, try again!

Keep it local!

Your primary audience is the local community. Consider all the different ways people already access local information such as the parish / church newsletter; community website; posters and leaflets on notice boards, and in the village hall, shop, pub, church etc.

By linking in with existing communications, you don't have to work as hard to reach people, and they're more likely to trust and take notice of your message.

Ask local groups if you can speak briefly at their next meeting, to introduce the Scheme and hand out leaflets. Consider having a stand at the next Summer / Christmas Fair and at community coffee mornings and other events.

Media

Getting an article in a local newspaper can be a very effective way of raising awareness.

Try to make the most of key milestones to give your story a 'hook' e.g. your launch; one year anniversary; recruitment of new volunteers.

Website and Social Media

A website can be an effective online shop window for your scheme. Whether you create your own site or use a community or parish website, make sure it stays up to date.

Creating a Facebook page or group is quick and free. Facebook may suit Good Neighbours Schemes better because it is more personal and community-focused. Connect with local accounts and encourage volunteers to share posts to widen your reach at no cost.

And finally…

When creating a poster, leaflet, press article, display stand or presentation, remember:

Use the 5 W's…

For more information please contact ACTion with Communities in Cumbria on Tel: 01768 425666 or visit our website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

ACT champions community and rural issues

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