

# Compassionate People





## Foreword - David Gledhill

March 16th 2020, a date seared into my brain, the day everything changed. The day we launched the Torbay Community Coronavirus Helpline - one week before the first lockdown with little idea of what was to come. In the columns that follow, we track the progress of not just the virus and its many impacts, but the growth of the Helpline, the people behind it and the numerous examples of what we came to call #TorbayKind. Since the onset of the pandemic, the word unprecedented has been overused, but to be fair, no other word comes close. Emotions ran high, and at times, fear was overwhelming, but our communities responded in ways never seen before and for that, we are all very grateful. We have been lucky to live in Torbay, where communities rallied, neighbours helped neighbours and strangers came forward to ensure that no one in the Bay went hungry and no one in the Bay was left lonely and isolated. This is how this life changing year unfolded.

COMPASSIONATE



# Fighting ageism

11 March 2020

David Gledhill

## **ONE of the issues that we are determined to fight in Torbay wherever we find it, is ageism.**

Like other isms – sexism, and racism, it is insidious and damaging, but ageism is a relatively recent development, but no less serious for all that.

Until only a few decades ago extended families lived together – children with parents, and often with grandparents, something that remains the norm to this day in many Mediterranean countries.

It is a win, win. The children get the benefit of decades of accumulated knowledge and wisdom, and the parents get the support of their own parents during what can be difficult and testing times.

On a practical level, the parents also get unpaid childminders by day, allowing them to continue to work and babysitters by night to enable them to continue to socialise. And as the children get older, more indulgent, kind and loving relatives who are mostly on their side. What's not to like?

But sometime after the war as we became more prosperous, our families became smaller in terms of the generational span and children and young people had less and less interaction with older people.

Parents began having children later in life and living greater distances from their own parents. Not to mention that lives seem busier nowadays. Add to this the fact that our lives are becoming more segregated and accommodation for older people is, more often than not, set apart from where younger generations live.

At last, it is being recognised, and there is a movement to reunite the generations and promote a better understanding between them

Some are innovatory, like mixing young people's accommodation with elderly people's housing in Helsingborg in Sweden. Under 25's can live there for reduced rent as long as they commit to a few hours of conversation with their older housemates each week.

Genius, both generations keep each other company, learn from each other and neither are lonely as is so often the case when living as single people. They live together in a converted old people's home with lots of shared spaces where they can come together to enjoy each other's company.

They make meals and eat together, they play games together – the likes of tabletop football and pool rather than Mortal Kombat or Call of Duty, and they make things together in the arts and crafts room.

Young people found that having left home, they might go out to work and then return to their flats to play screen games, never speaking to anyone outside the workplace.

Older people, many of whom found themselves living alone again after bereavement after decades of sharing their homes with a loved one might not speak to anyone for days on end.

Now the younger people can share their knowledge of the technological world around them, not least the internet and social media and the older people can put life in context with historical perspectives.

Torbay Council, if you are reading this, it is all done under the auspices of the local authority, and they are so pleased with it, they are looking at creating more. As we have shown through Ageing Well Torbay, happiness and less loneliness leads to better health and fewer visits to the doctor. The same is true of young people.

The UK's first National Intergenerational Week takes place from 23rd to 29th March 2020, and we at AWT are working with our colleagues at Imagine This... a project with young people looking to overcome a variety of issues including loneliness to make Torbay a better place to grow up in.

We will be joining colleagues not just in Torbay, but across the country to discuss ways that we can bring the generations together to promote understanding and will be boasting our successes with the hashtag #IntergenerationalWeek

The organisation behind Intergenerational Week is the St Monica Trust who have spotted the need to bring the generations back together to prevent wedges being driven between them.

They recognise that the further apart the generations become, then isolation can begin to creep in along with a poorer understanding and awareness of each other.

In their own words: "It's a downward spiral where negative stereotypes and attitudes can take hold all too easily. We think it's about time we change the way we do things. It's time to say no to the age gap."

And that is something we at both Ageing Well Torbay and Imagine This.. can endorse wholeheartedly.

generations 1

# Communities pull together

18 March 2020

David Gledhill

## **IF ever there was a need for communities to pull together and watch out for their own, then it is during the current coronavirus crisis.**

The authorities, including those at the sharp end in the NHS and public health, are doing a fantastic job, but they can't do it all, and they can't do it by themselves. They need our help.

We have some very strong communities across Torbay, but some are less so, and we have to stop to consider what we mean by a community. In this case, we have to think small; we have to think local, we have to think within yards of our doorsteps.

We were more unlucky than most in the Bay, with some of the earliest cases of coronavirus being discovered in people returning from Northern Italy, causing the temporary closure of Churston Ferrers School and doctor's surgeries in Chelston.

But it meant that the very real threat was brought home in very clear terms, very early on and some people that we have come across, particularly and inevitably through the Ageing Well Torbay programme are scared and stressed.

Already we are aware through our community builders that some people are self-isolating for fear of contracting the virus, particularly those that already have an underlying condition that would be exacerbated.

Some of them may not even have had the chance to tell their friends and neighbours what they were planning and may be in need of top-up supplies being delivered to their door.

Not everyone either has the will or the ability to stockpile – they might not be able to afford a big shop and even if they could, would never be able to carry the heavy bags home and may now have very limited supplies.

We all need to think about who we haven't seen for a few days – it may be a neighbour, it may be someone further along the street, they may be older, but they may also be younger, but have existing problems that make them vulnerable.

Is there someone in your street? It doesn't take a minute to pop round and ask the question – if they aren't, they will be incredibly grateful, and if they are, they will appreciate your concern anyway.

You don't have to put yourself at risk – you don't need to make physical contact, and you don't need to get close enough to risk infection. Shout it across the garden if it makes you feel better, but do it. Someone not very far from you might need you.

There is lots of advice out there from the Department of Health, and by far the most important tips are to ensure you keep your hands clean with regular washing for at least as long as it takes to sing Happy Birthday at least twice.

Then there is the catchy mantra – Catch it, Bin it, Kill it which applies to coughs and sneezes not being made into your hands but into a handkerchief or into the crook of your elbow.

Beyond that, there appears to be little anyone can do in the Bay other than follow sensible advice, and for those most at risk, to self isolate. Among the older population, that need will be more prevalent than among the young.

We need to accept that because our population in the Bay is older than the national average – nearly 50% are over the age of 50, and one in four are over the age of 65 – then the problem here could be worse than in other areas. We hope not, but no one knows.

We are in it for the long haul, and we need to check on each other, not just today, but tomorrow and for the foreseeable future. Our neighbours may need favours – shopping, collecting prescriptions, dog walking, phone buddies, to name but a few, that will allow them to stay in their own homes, some with the illness and some who are self-isolating.

People need each other more today than they have for many years and it will test the connections that have been eroded. Hopefully though the traditions are strong and they can be restored when they are most needed. Now.

If you need help or want to offer help, the phone line, which will be staffed 8am to 8pm, is 01803 446022. Brixham Does Care can be contacted directly on 01803 857727 (mon-fri 9am to 4.30pm).

together

# #TorbayKind encapsulates the Bay

25 March 2020

David Gledhill

## **THE #TorbayKind - read that hashtag and remember it, because it encapsulates what is happening across the Bay.**

Two words, one hashtag, lots of emotion, not just one community but lots of communities showing amazing practicality and resolve to get through the current coronavirus crisis.

We knew our communities were strong, but even we have been taken aback by the offers of help that have been flowing into our helpline – both on the phone and online at [www.bit.ly/torbayhelpline](http://www.bit.ly/torbayhelpline).

All our team are now taking it in turns to staff the telephone helpline – 01803 446022, which is open from 8 am to 8 pm (seven days a week) and our colleagues at

Brixham Does Care are doing the same for their number 01803 857727, which is staffed from 9 am to 4.30 pm (Monday to Friday).

It isn't easy.

Thankfully we have had nearly 400 people come forward to offer to help their neighbours with a host of tasks from collecting prescriptions to doing shopping, to walking the dog or by simply becoming phone befrienders and checking in with people who are not just self-isolating, but are as a result entirely alone.

We have also had more than 100 requests for help and we are working as quickly as we can to put people in touch with each other, generally based on where both parties live.

And then there are the calls from people who are quite simply scared. They need a friendly voice, albeit at the end of a phone, to talk through their anxiety and some of those calls are heart-breaking.

Mother's Day was, of course, a case in point; the best laid plans were abandoned in favour of keeping our Mum's safe and as well meaning and sensible as that was, there was more than one tear shed as a result.

Others worry that at their time of need, elderly relatives do not have the physical support and presence of their loved ones because of either self-isolation or geographical distance.

We know through our work with Ageing Well that a great many people retire here, leaving families and friends behind, which even in 'normal' times can lead to unintended loneliness and isolation,

The current crisis is potentially exacerbated in the Bay where the population is nearly 50% over the age of 50 and one in four are over the age of 65.

We cannot, and we will not offer medical advice – that is for the 111 NHS service, which is available both by phone and online, and we are aware that some people are struggling to get through to it, but all we can advise is to keep on trying.

We do not know how long this crisis will last or how bad it will get and we do not yet know how much of society will be forced to stay in their own homes for the duration, but we do know that where we can help, we will.

Community and charitable organisations across the Bay are stepping up in a way that has never been seen before. They have always been there but have never had the recognition that they deserve.

This is their time.

A combination of determination within communities – big and small – alongside groups that organise and galvanise action are working with our local council, NHS and emergency services in ways that have never been seen before.

The worst is almost certainly still to come and it is as well to remember the words of Dickens ironically used in a recent TV advert: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us."

Things will never be the same again, but as we are proving in Brixham, Paignton and Torquay and all the areas in between, the human spirit is ultimately a kind one and one that will help their neighbour in times of need.

We need to continue to work together and we need to imagine together. We are all in this together and because of that we really need to be #TorbayKind

If you need help or want to offer help please go to: [www.bit.ly/helpline](http://www.bit.ly/helpline) Or call 01803 446022 or contact BDC on 01803 857727

kind

# Words don't often fail me

1 April 2020

David Gledhill

## **WORDS don't often fail me, but over the last few days I have struggled to find the right ones to encapsulate what is happening across the Bay and across the country.**

I came close on Thursday night when doors and windows were briefly thrown open to allow the sound of clapping to fill the night sky across the Bay in tribute to the army of caring people putting themselves at risk to help others.

That includes the NHS, of course, but elsewhere there are a thousand kindnesses being exchanged every minute – shopping for neighbours, delivering prescriptions, or simply checking in on someone who had slipped off the radar.

Far be it for me to blow our own trumpet, but the team that is the Torbay Community Development Trust have been at the forefront of the caring response since the crisis blew up two weeks ago.

Everything else was dropped and all our efforts were focussed on helping others across the Bay – putting people in need in touch with people prepared to help and the response has been, at times, overwhelming.

Working alongside our colleagues at Healthwatch Torbay, Age UK Torbay and Brixham Does Care; we have had teams of up to five people staffing the phones from eight in the morning to eight at night, responding within just a few hours to sometimes desperate cries for help.

We have had tearful exchanges with terrified self-isolators low on medications, out of food and out of money and by mobilising some amazing people, not least our own community builders, we have been able to help.

Sometimes all that is needed is a virtual shoulder to cry on, the sound of a friendly voice or some straight talking no-nonsense, non-medical advice borne out of us all being in this together.

We listen to the worries of families that are separated sometimes by just a few miles and sometimes by oceans, unable to visit their ageing parents, relatives and siblings and not knowing when they will again.

I have no idea what the Blitz spirit was; I wasn't there, but this week I have spoken to some people who were and they again pause to marvel at the fortitude of the human spirit at times of crisis.

But they are also keen to point out that this is a different crisis and therefore one that does not have an instruction

manual, nor experience to learn from – even during the war, the pubs remained open and people were able to take to the streets, albeit cautiously.

One ninety one year old summed it up: "I thought I had lived through the lot – wars, Asian flu, terrorism in our own backyard, but now this? "

Most of us have only been locked down for a week and this is just the beginning. For some, it might simply seem like an unexpected holiday, a chance to catch up on all those jobs around the home.

Sharing platforms like Facebook and Twitter and virtual face to face video call providers like Zoom and Skype have seen unprecedented increases in demand as we touch base with friends and relatives around the world to share unreal experiences.

And we know, having seen the same in Italy and Spain, that the worst is still to come. The most vulnerable in our communities – our friends, our neighbours are going to need us more than ever.

More people – older people, the vulnerable, young families, those that have lost their jobs will all begin to feel the pinch as the money and the food runs out. But we will be there for them.

So far, we have taken more than 2000 calls on the 01803 446022 and 01803 857727 numbers and as well as identifying those who need our help we have also recruited an army of volunteers poised to provide support.

Our community builders have been amazing, some working round the clock, regardless of the risk to themselves. They have queued for hours for food, even longer for prescriptions and have done endless runs to the foodbanks.

If ever there was a team of people that you need in a crisis, then it is the team of which I am proud to be a part – the Torbay Community Development Trust and partners team. To rewrite a well known quote: "Cometh the hour, cometh the TCDT Team".

If you need help, or want to offer help, ring 01803 446022 or in Brixham 01803 857727 from 8 am to 8 pm; sign up at: [www.bit.ly/torbayhelpline](http://www.bit.ly/torbayhelpline) or if you want to organise your neighbours to help each other: [www.bit.ly/torbaymicrovol](http://www.bit.ly/torbaymicrovol).

families

# Stepping forward to help

8 April 2020

David Gledhill

## **HUNDREDS of people across the Bay have stepped forward to help their neighbours during the coronavirus crisis.**

A small army of volunteers is now working to ensure their neighbours are able to get through the crisis with offers of help with shopping, collecting prescriptions or simply spending time talking on the phone.

Others have said they will join our teams which we have brought together from Torbay Community Development Trust, Age UK Torbay, Healthwatch Torbay and Brixham Does Care, as they staff our helplines from 8 am till 8 pm every day on 01803 446022 or 01803 857727.

We have already logged nearly 3000 calls, and at its peak, we were handling up to 60 calls an hour as the reality of the lock down began to bite and some people began to realise that they were obliged to stay behind closed doors and would be unable to go out and get their own supplies.

Some have been in urgent need of support with food cupboards empty and electricity and gas already run out, others have been able to plan more than a week in advance, still safe in the knowledge that our teams or our volunteers will be there for them when the time comes.

For others who didn't have time to prepare for the crisis it has meant that sometimes life-saving medications have had to be rushed out to them via our dedicated (in every sense of the word) team of community builders.

We have had up to five people staffing more than ten phone lines at any one time to ensure everyone will be helped, if not immediately then in a reasonable time scale.

Some of our callers have already run out of money, having been caught out by sudden unemployment and they have struggled to get themselves onto Universal Credit because the phone lines to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) are constantly engaged.

Even those who have managed to complete the 'paperwork' online have then found they can't get through to DWP to verify their identities, further delaying their claims for payment.

At the beginning of last week, DWP were inevitably overwhelmed with claims, many of them new, and despite their staff's best efforts, who knows how long it will take to clear the backlog?

Foodbanks have stepped up several gears, and again our volunteers and staff on the ground have been busy putting together essential food parcels before delivering them to those in most urgent need.

Not everyone is coping with the lockdown as well as they might hope. For some, it was a welcome break at home, a chance to catch up with lots of jobs around the garden and in the home.

However, what started as an anxious time for others has now become even more stressful, as well as a cause of depression. Partners and whole families have been thrown together 24/7 and in some households that is the root of the problem.

Calls to the helpline are changing, and we find ourselves now dealing with more complex situations, in some cases with people who do not know where to turn, and for them the friendly voice at the end of the line is all they need to hear.

Mental health issues are beginning to come to the fore and a network of online counsellors is being coordinated in an attempt to provide the essential support that is needed.

Some callers just need to know that even though they are self-isolating and have not seen anyone for more than two weeks now, that they are not alone, others are in the same position and they are prepared to reach out (virtually) to each other.

In some cases, the sunshine helped – a chance to exercise gently in beautiful weather or sunbathe in the garden; for others it was just another reminder of what they were missing – wide open spaces, and beaches.

We know there is more of the same to come and more than ever we need to find ways of keeping in touch, striking up conversations, being company for and a comfort to each other even if that's not in the physical sense we are used to.

We need to smile beneath our masks, and even if we cannot shake hands, hug or make any contact, we can still nod our heads or clasp our hands in front of our chests in a gesture of friendliness.

We need to remember that we are all in this together and together we will get through it with a bit of #TorbayKind.

forward

# One Easter break that we will not forget

15 April 2020

David Gledhill

**WELL that was one Easter break that we will not forget in a hurry. Sunshine, warmth and four walls in which to enjoy it. Tragic.**

But not as tragic as venturing out unnecessarily may have been for someone else – someone you never knowingly met and will never know that you were responsible for their illness or even their death.

A few weeks ago, none of this would have seemed possible – the virus, the lockdown and effective cancellation of the first outdoor public holiday break of the year.

Yet it has proved not just possible, but an horrific reality that has knocked us all for six, no matter what our previous health or wealth were. It is an oft-repeated phrase, but we are all in this together.

And how.

Yes, we are all in this together but it is not the same for each and everyone. As some are now starting to observe, those at the lower end of the wealth spectrum are suffering more than others.

Emily Maitliss nailed it in her introduction to Newsnight on Wednesday when she dispelled the myth that coronavirus is a great leveller and pointed out that it does affect the lower-paid disproportionately.

Torbay is not the wealthiest of areas; on the contrary, some areas are among the top 10% poorest in the country. The hospitality industry is not renowned for great rates of pay and we also have an unusually high number of people living in the Bay that are living off their state pensions.

Add to them the shelf stackers, the NHS workers, the social care workers who have all remained on the front line and you have a recipe for inequality as well as a higher chance of infection.

Our own teams that remain in the community, standing in queues, picking up essential foodstuff and life saving medical supplies, are not the highest of paid workers in the Bay, but they are still out there.

Along with all the other people already listed here, our teams are prepared to put themselves at risk to help get us through this crisis.

Yes, they are given the opportunity to opt out, but when you commit to a caring profession that does not reward with great riches, you are in it for the long haul and that

is why they are still out there looking after the communities they care so passionately.

Our social hierarchy is being turned on its head and our lowest paid have proved to be the mainstay upon which we rely – something that we should all take time to reflect on as and when we come out of this crisis.

There is not enough space in this newspaper, let alone this column for me to express the pride I feel in working with our teams, whether they work for us directly, indirectly or alongside.

We are seeing the best that society can offer and thankfully very little of the worst, but we are dealing with the self-isolated on a daily basis, and some are coping well, some not so well and some not at all.

The calls to our helplines – 01803 446022 and 01803 857727, which remain staffed seven days a week from 8 am to 8 pm – are getting longer and they are getting more complex.

No longer are a few reassuring words all that is needed; some of what is required is of a far more complicated nature that goes to the root of our mental health and wellbeing.

Some people already had problems, others are now presenting with issues they never knew they had, and it is to be expected after a few weeks staring at the same four walls without access to a garden or a half decent view.

Money can buy you all these things, along with the space to relax in to enjoy them and for them, the biggest threat is boredom. For some, this is an enforced holiday to be enjoyed. To others, it is an enduring hell that is hard to tolerate.

We don't know when this will all be over, but when it is, let us not go back to old attitudes and most of all let us not forget what some of the most upon in our society have done for us.

Let us continue to appreciate them, continue to applaud them and remember to thank them – not just once a week on a Thursday night, but in our hearts, where it counts.

Sign up at: [www.bit.ly/torbayhelpline](http://www.bit.ly/torbayhelpline) or if you want to organise your neighbours to help each other: [www.bit.ly/torbaymicrovol](http://www.bit.ly/torbaymicrovol).

Sunshine

# Wartime spirit

22 April 2020

David Gledhill

**MORE than a month into this crisis and people who are struggling to find ways to describe the experience, often refer to the wartime spirit.**

Several times in the last week, I have been lucky enough to talk to some of those who did live through WWII and they repeatedly make the comparison and refer to the kindness of their communities in times of adversity.

Here at the Torbay Community Development Trust, where we are staffing helplines and responding to requests for help, as well as taking offers of help, we too can say that when the going gets tough, then people in the Bay get going.

Just over a century ago, in 1915 during the First World War, a Government department came up with the slogan 'What did you do in the War, Daddy?' As a way of shaming people into stepping up and doing their bit.

Not surprisingly, it came in for a lot of criticism and was the subject of heated debate for decades afterward. Thankfully, propaganda is no longer taken at face value, but many people will find themselves answering a very similar question in the future.

What did you do in the coronavirus crisis of 2020?

For thousands in Torbay, the answer will be succinct – we stayed inside, locked our doors and relied upon the kindness of others to stay fed and to stay healthy.

For the many volunteers that have come forward to make that possible, the answer will be different because they are the ones that have ensured their neighbours have enough food and that their, sometimes life-saving, meds have continued to arrive as needed.

Across the Bay, communities are organising themselves in ways we haven't seen since the World Wars, and they are ensuring that they are looking out for each other.

Our helplines – 01803 446022 and 01803 857727 are staffed 12 hours a day, seven days a week, and we are answering calls for help with offers of help, as locally as we can manage.

Every call we receive is graded – black is an immediate need; food has run out, meds have run out, the electricity or gas meter needs a top up, and individuals or families are suffering.

Red is applied if someone is getting close to running out of meds or food and they will need deliveries of either or both within 24 to 48 hours.

Amber is when the need is less pressing and someone is warning that they will need help, but not for a few days.

And then there is Green where someone has very sensibly realised that they will need help at some point in the future, but not just yet.

Community builders from TCDT and wellbeing coordinators from Age UK Torbay alongside community volunteers from the helpline are there for the emergencies and have helped hundreds already.

Behind the scenes, we are working hard to match up volunteers with people in need so that they can support each other throughout this crisis. We look for people who live relatively close to each other and then match offers with needs – hopefully for the duration, although of course illness can change everything.

By matching people together, we can look after prescription collections, food deliveries and even dog walking if required, and we can also provide much needed company for people – albeit through the safe medium of a phone. Our befriending service is growing and has the advantage that it can be done by people in isolation for people in isolation.

We are also helping communities that are self organising across Torquay, Paignton and Brixham at a street level, asking neighbours to look after each other and there are now 45 such schemes.

Some of them have swapped phone numbers, others have telephone trees to make sure no-one gets left out and others have set up WhatsApp groups to keep everyone in touch with each other.

They are doing each other's shopping, they are having group chats and they are doing it all within their own communities, which continue to benefit by the day.

If the question is asked in the future – what did you do during the coronavirus crisis in 2020 then in Torbay, at least, I am pretty sure the answer will be – I looked after my neighbours and we are all stronger as a result.

To sign up as a volunteer go online: [www.bit.ly/torbayhelpline](http://www.bit.ly/torbayhelpline) or to help organise your street or neighbourhood go to: [www.bit.ly/torbaymicrovol](http://www.bit.ly/torbaymicrovol). Or ring one of our helplines.

Spirit

# Current predicament- unthinkable

29 April 2020

David Gledhill

## A FEW months ago our current predicament would have been simply unthinkable.

Normal life went on apace with the words coronavirus and COVID-19 barely registering in the average lexicon. We were aware of a virus raging elsewhere in the world, but who honestly thought it would lay us low too?

And then, on March 2nd, it was announced that two people in South Devon were amongst the first to succumb to the virus bringing it home from a trip to northern Italy.

Authorities were quick to react and in the main, the outbreak, which spread to a handful of other people, was contained. For most, it looked like an overreaction to a relatively small problem.

How wrong we were.

Within a week, we were hoovering up as much news as we could and watched with a creeping realisation of what was to come here, the horror unfolding in communities in our near neighbours in Europe.

Pubs, cafes and restaurants were closed, sports events were called off, and we began to exercise caution around our fellow man. We became suspicious of even the smallest of changes in the health of our friends, family and colleagues.

Here at the Torbay Community Development Trust, we recognised early on that we, along with other key organisations in the Bay, were best placed to lead the response in our communities and on March 16th the Torbay Community Coronavirus Helpline was launched.

The Government announced a week later, on March 23rd, that the whole country was going into lockdown and families and individuals found themselves shut inside their own homes for up to 23 hours a day, only being allowed out for essentials like food and exercise.

For others, the most vulnerable in our society, the lockdown was absolute, and they became reliant on friends, neighbours and our helplines for all the things we take for granted – food, medicines and company.

The reaction was overwhelming. The phones started ringing, and for several weeks it did not stop, or so it seemed. The lines established on 01803 857727 and 01803 446022 were swamped – on one day, our teams, who work between 8 am and 8 pm, seven days a week, took around 400 calls.

We pooled our resources with Brixham Does Care, Age UK Torbay, Healthwatch Torbay and the Citizens Advice Bureau in Torbay to cover all bases – we needed to be able to keep abreast of the latest guidance coming out of the

Government and the NHS and we needed to make sure we were looking after vulnerable people in our communities

We all needed to provide a lead in our specialist areas and work together in an unprecedented way, filling in each other's gaps, complementing skills and delivering the very best of expertise available in the local charity and voluntary sector.

It is no wonder that nationally a new hashtag has been coined to ensure that the work of the sector is recognised when this is all over (whenever that might be) #nevermoreneeded.

We are still working flat out alongside the NHS and Torbay Council and have recently been part of a coalition of 15 organisations and foodbanks who have formed the Torbay Food Alliance to make sure no one goes hungry during the crisis.

But we have also tapped into the very best of #TorbayKind and found hundreds of volunteers who are now helping their neighbours and watching out for them for the duration.

We have matched offers of help with those needing help on as local a basis as possible. Hopefully, those people will remain in touch with each other, responding where and when necessary, until the help is no longer needed.

Our wellbeing coordinators and community builders are still out on the front line responding to urgent needs such as food running out, or life saving medications in need of picking up.

But the community builders are now able to turn their attention to supporting the 50 plus streets or communities that have organised themselves into self-sufficient Good Neighbour support groups through our [www.bit.ly/torbaymicrovol](http://www.bit.ly/torbaymicrovol) project.

We have also been able to put more effort into supporting communities through the [www.torbayhelphub.com](http://www.torbayhelphub.com) which provides general advice for all and ideas of what to do during the lockdown.

We are hearing tentative debates about when doors will begin to open again when schools will reopen to pupils, and when we will begin to venture back to our places of work.

For the most vulnerable, however, the end is not in sight and, looking at lessons learned elsewhere, is unlikely to be for some considerable time. We will be there for them for as long as it takes.

And that's a promise

promise



co-operation

# WEEK seven of the lockdown

6 May 2020

David Gledhill

## **WEEK seven of the lockdown and some things are beginning to fall into their own rhythm with all sorts of new 'normals'.**

Frequency of calls to the Torbay Community Coronavirus Helpline is slowing a little, though they still run to around 140 a day and the needs of callers can still be urgent and immediate.

The majority of people appear to be coping well either by themselves or with the help of neighbours, friends and relatives – each looking out for each other whether in person (two metres apart) or on the phone.

But for others, the ongoing isolation is taking its toll and calls to the helpline, which remains staffed from eight in the morning until eight at night, seven days a week, are becoming longer and more complex.

Such is the expertise available to us from key organisations in the Bay such as Age UK Torbay, Brixham Does Care, Healthwatch Torbay and Citizen's Advice Torbay that we have been able to deal with everything that has been thrown at us thus far.

We were able to mobilise community builders and wellbeing coordinators to make sure no one went hungry, and no one was left without potentially life-saving drugs and to date, our rapid response teams have reacted to more than 1000 emergencies.

And now, with an army of volunteers swelling our ranks, we are preparing to step back a little and take stock of what is needed next and what will be needed as we go forward. And the first question has to be: go forward into what?

What will the coming months look like? What will define our 'new normal'? None of us knows, and so we have to prepare for lots of different scenarios, some of them extreme affecting tens of thousands of people, some less so involving fewer.

Our communities across the Bay have shown their strength and resilience during this crisis, with people volunteering from day one, long before we knew the scale and seriousness of what we were dealing with every day, they are out there and we have managed to match up those in need with those offering help. There are now 757 people matched to people who need help going forward.

In a nutshell, between our teams and our volunteers we are helping people in their times of need every day of the week and we are proud to be able to do so.

More volunteers mean that our community builders can begin to step back from the frontline from being the emergency response team and go back to doing what they have always done - helping our communities be the best that they can.

Already they have never been more needed and as we emerge from this crisis, we are going to need them and their knowledge of communities in the Bay more than ever.

They will be on hand to pull people ever closer together, to ensure that the most vulnerable in our society continue to enjoy the support of their neighbours and, in many cases, newly made friends.

We have 50 projects across the Bay where neighbours have organised themselves into support groups - to contact each other, run errands for each other and just as importantly, talk to each other, and community builder will be in touch with them to see if there is any way they can help.

Strong communities are going to be needed more in the coming weeks as people look for ways out of lockdown, not helped by mixed messages coming from various quarters and the easing of restrictions in certain areas, such as the reopening of B&Q.

We must not forget that whilst most people have been in isolation for seven weeks, the more cautious and the more vulnerable have been in lockdown for a full two months and the prospect of that being lifted any time soon are negligible.

Even when schools begin to reopen and people return to their places of work, there will be a great many who cannot rejoin their colleagues. When the time comes for pubs and restaurants to reopen, socialising for them will remain out of the question.

There are just short of 4,000 individuals in Torbay who are considered to be extremely vulnerable and have been shielded as a result. For them, the only real prospect of stepping out of their front doors is a vaccine.

We must never lose sight of them because they will continue to need our support – not just in practical ways, but by also making sure they remain safe from the virus, no matter how long that takes.

rhythm

# Light showing at the end of the tunnel 13 May 2020

David Gledhill

## **ANOTHER week in lockdown, with light showing at the end of the tunnel for some, but for others, no change.**

Calls to the Torbay Community Coronavirus Helpline continue to come in thick and fast, though not as many as we experienced at the beginning of the crisis, and the nature of the calls is changing.

With each week that passes, people are reacting differently to the crisis depending on their own circumstances and their personal reaction to the unfolding uncertainty that continues to face us all.

Initially, we dealt with hundreds and hundreds of emergencies where people that had been unable to prepare for lockdown found themselves running out of food and life-saving medications.

Our rapid response team was out all day, every day joining endless queues at pharmacies for prescriptions and at supermarkets stripped by stockpiling, but the calls on the helpline were efficiently brief, mostly containing plaintive cries for practical help.

And as the days stretched into weeks and the weeks became months, the calls fell into a rhythm of predictability, with the main areas of concern being money, food, medications and loneliness.

They also have, the longer the lockdown has lasted, become longer as people reach out not just for the necessities but for the company and reassurance, the sound of a human voice, albeit one at the end of a phone, can bring.

Inevitably across the Bay, there are people, particularly among the shielded, who have not seen another person for more than two months or heard a fellow human's voice other than through the radio or television.

For them, loneliness and isolation has become the norm, and we have been working on contacting the most vulnerable to offer them the comfort of a regular call for as long as is necessary.

For the more complex cases, we have developed a new script for the Helpline team handling the calls, which helps recognise those that need a little more than a befriending call because their mental health is deteriorating.

We have developed a triage service that seeks to catch those going into a spiral and to provide the support that they need, when they need it, albeit in ways other than the traditional face to face.

Recently, the majority of people now calling either 1803 446022 or 01803 857727, no matter what they ask for, have one underlying need – to have a chat.

Many just want someone else to know that they are there, that their changed circumstances are no different to anyone else's. They may not be able to see their neighbours, their friends, their families, but they are not alone.

Across the Bay, we know that there are people who just want to talk, to hear a voice to be reassured. We are, in the main, social beings and loneliness and isolation does not suit us.

Our community builders have been ringing people that we have come across during our work with Ageing Well Torbay over the last five years throughout the lockdown.

That work has allowed us to know more about vulnerable older people and loneliness and isolation than most.

For all the reasons outlined above, the calls have not been short, and people have loved the opportunity to discuss their predicaments and to find out how others are coping,

As a result, some of them have become telephone befrienders themselves, recognising their own needs in others and rising to the challenge within their own communities.

They recognise in themselves and in others that they are struggling to maintain social connections and that some are bored of their own company 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

They also accept the anxiety of the realisation that this is not going to change anytime soon as the most vulnerable in our society have no immediate prospect of the lockdown being lifted.

As others drift back to work and school and life begins to open up for the majority, there are thousands for whom their four walls will remain their unbending boundary for the foreseeable future.

We also recognise that some of our younger and able-bodied volunteers will be going back to work over the next few weeks and we will need more volunteers to step into their shoes.

The Prime Minister's address last weekend was to some good news, to others bad news and for thousands more, no news at all and it is people in the second and third groups that we will continue to help wherever we can.

light

# Life turned upside down

20 May 2020

*Christine Durrant*

*Christine is a community builder and has been one of the Torbay Community Coronavirus Helpline emergency response team.*

## **MY LIFE as a community builder has always been flexible and varied. Suddenly Covid 19 hit and life seemed to turn upside down.**

Fortunately for me, I have no underlying health problems so am not in a high-risk category. In the early weeks, it was crazy busy. We would get emails from the office helpline staff all through the day asking us to go to different pharmacies to collect prescriptions, to food banks to collect food parcels and to shops to do basic shopping and then deliver these things to those who are self-isolating.

There were queues everywhere. It would be an hour waiting outside one pharmacy and another hour at the next. We sometimes visit five different pharmacies or the same pharmacy three times. Sometimes we would get in and find that the prescription was not there yet; other times, they could only give us half the items. These were stressful occasions as we knew that people were relying on us to bring their medication.

I tried to avoid the bigger supermarkets where the shelves were empty and the queues were long. Often the smaller local shops could provide everything that was needed. Sometimes I was able to connect people with our local greengrocer who would take their order and deliver it, a real blessing when it was impossible to get an online delivery from the bigger supermarkets.

I have always enjoyed living in my patch and now more than ever, I am glad that is the case. When the decision was made to close the public toilets, it did not adversely affect me. I can pop home for a comfort break and for my lunch. For those who live outside the Bay or work in Torquay while living in Paignton or Brixham it was not so easy.

Every day there were seemingly endless emails sending us in all directions, morning, noon and night. I will admit that my heart still sinks when I look for the last time of an evening and find more deliveries needing to be done.

Now nearly two months on, things are easing. It takes time to check the volunteers' references and match them with people needing support, but more and more people are being connected. Wherever possible, we are

matching volunteers with people who live nearby, which can only make neighbourhoods stronger.

Thankfully there are fewer emergency pick-ups to do now. This frees me to help in other capacities. I am matching volunteers to people in isolation, catching up on emails and connecting with people in my patch, checking how they are and trying to help them stay connected with each other.

I look forward to the day when we can all meet in person again. My concern is that for some people, the lockdown will have compromised their general fitness and mobility – walking around a flat is not the same as walking to the shops. Another problem will be the very real fear that many people have of catching COVID-19 even after we are allowed more freedom. Having spent the last five years helping people to get out and socialise, we may struggle to help them overcome that fear to be able to come out of this necessary hiding.

Knowing that we were in this for the long haul, I try to use my days off wisely. Recognising the importance of keeping myself well, both mentally and physically, I make sure that I take time to refresh and rebalance.

When we consider those who live in crowded cities, in flats without gardens, or streets without green trees, we recognise just how blessed we are to live in this beautiful part of the world. We can walk to the beach or to the woods. The fact we have been allowed to exercise outside only once a day has encouraged me to exercise more often than I used to. No matter how long or tiring my work day has been I am desperate to get out and enjoy this beautiful spring weather.

I am seeing new relationships being formed as neighbours gather together on Thursday nights to cheer all those key workers who keep going for us all.

Friendships form as people volunteer to help their neighbours. Strangers are greeting each other as they keep what I like to call 'a friendly distance'. Let's keep looking for the positive outcomes and may our community be a stronger one at the end of this crisis.

flexible

# Fabulous weather

27 May 2020

David Gledhill

## **ANOTHER Bank Holiday and more fabulous weather tempting more people out of lockdown.**

But for a lot of people, nothing has changed. It probably won't for a long time yet and that is why we will continue to staff the Torbay Community Coronavirus Helpline, offering support and advice whenever it is needed.

We are reducing the hours a little, but we have also increased the number of people available to answer the calls as they come into 01803 446022 between 10 am and 6 pm from Monday to Friday and from 9.30 am until 12.30 pm on Saturdays.

Since we started the helpline more than ten weeks ago, we have been there for more than 7,500 people who have rung in to ask for help or with offers of help.

Initially, we were overwhelmed, but somehow we managed to stay on top of it as more and more people from other organisations joined the Torbay Community Development Trust, Age UK Torbay, Brixham Does Care and Healthwatch Torbay.

As the crisis progressed, we offered advice and expertise on an ever wider range of subjects and staff from Citizens Advice Torbay, and Torbay Council were on hand at the end of the phone to make sure the right people were providing the right answers.

We can now help with just about everything from mental health issues to financial advice as well as shopping, prescription collections and telephone befriending. We can also just be there for you.

As the lockdown eases for some, we are aware that others are feeling even more alone and isolated as they look out of the window and see others taking the first steps back to normality.

From the beginning, we have had volunteers – some locked down themselves – available to make phone calls to assure others that they have not been abandoned and others are in the same position.

Lots has changed, and lots more will continue to change as people return to work, the High Street throws open its doors, and pubs and restaurants re-open – albeit tentatively.

Our challenge is to think differently and to act differently to make sure we remain alert and stay safe, and with that

in mind, we have taken the decision to move our annual celebration that is the Ageing Well Festival into next year.

October we feel, is simply too soon to even think about bringing thousands of older people together in one place, but that got us thinking. What if we bring people together, but not in a physical sense?

A few weeks ago, lots of us knew nothing of Skype or Zoom. We had never used FaceTime, and WhatsApp was a mystery, but now things are different and they are the main ways we have kept in touch with each other through all this.

We have joined exercise classes online, sung in virtual choirs, done pub quizzes without going to the bar and watched live theatre from the comfort of our own front rooms.

We live in a different world now. We figured that as well as moving the physical festival out to next April 17th we could go ahead with a virtual celebration on the original date of Saturday, October 24th.

Plans are only just starting to come together for the virtual festival but we are looking for a day long event which will feature a flavour of the regular events with talks, workshops and dance and exercise classes and of course music. Lots of music.

We are looking for the cream of the Bay's talent to come forward to work with us to make this another festival to remember. Just like last year at the Riviera Centre in Torquay, we want to put smiles on faces.

It is a challenge, but one that we know people will rise to that challenge and we want to hear from you if you have suggestions about what should be included.

We are aware that not everyone is on Facebook and not everyone is comfortable going online, but we hope to run remote training to get more people connected before the event.

We are looking at podcasts, live streaming on Facebook, classes on YouTube and videos hosted on our websites. The (virtual) world is our oyster. But we, of course, need your help to make it happen.

Please drop us a line to [ageingwell@torbaycdt.org.uk](mailto:ageingwell@torbaycdt.org.uk) if you have ideas or want to get involved and we will, if at all possible, make it happen.

Whether it is the helpline – 01803 446022 or the Ageing Well Festival, we are here for you

exercise

# Volunteers, you are awesome. 3 June 2020

David Gledhill

## **VOLUNTEERS, you are awesome.**

When the coronavirus crisis hit and the calls started coming in, we quickly realised we were going to need help. A lot of help

We asked for volunteers, and you came forward in your hundreds, and many of you are still with us today.

We can now boast a veritable army of volunteers across the Bay helping their friends, neighbours and even people they had, until a few weeks ago, never met and others that they won't see face to face for a while yet.

We knew our communities were strong and resilient, but even we have been taken aback by the determination to come through this together, with everyone doing their bit where they can.

We have been staggered by the individual acts of kindness that we have come to call #TorbayKind, with so many people going that extra mile for others.

Back in February, just a month before lockdown began, I wondered in a previous column whether volunteering had lost its shine. I speculated that in recent years the word volunteer appeared to have acquired a formal and disciplined aspect that we would all rather avoid.

How wrong I was.

I will happily eat my words and apologise to those who took me to task at the time because the old saying, "cometh the hour, cometh the man" has never been more apposite, and Torbay man and Torbay woman have come forward in an unprecedented way for these unprecedented times.

We were for a time overwhelmed by the response, such was the scale of it, but as things settled into a rhythm, we were able to take advantage of the help on offer.

In just a few weeks, we had more than 700 people prepared to do whatever was needed – whether it be joining snaking queues outside supermarkets to buy and deliver much needed food or to stand in equally long columns of people, two metres apart, outside pharmacies to collect prescriptions.

People were prepared to drop whatever they were doing when an urgent call came in and rush out to help wherever they could.

We also had people acting as drivers for the foodbanks – some travelling as far as Bristol to pick up essential supplies. Others were going from one of the 12 foodbank

bases spread across Paignton, Torquay and Brixham to ensure nutritious meals and food parcels were delivered where they were needed most.

Others, some self-isolating themselves, took to the phones, either as telephone befrienders – making calls to others who were lonely or isolated - or joining the teams of people staffing the Torbay Community Coronavirus Helpline.

When we named it a Community Helpline back at the beginning of March, we had no idea how apt that was – it has been uniting communities and supporting new communities ever since.

It has brought together not just volunteers from the Torbay Community Development Trust but from Age UK Torbay, Healthwatch Torbay and Citizens Advice Torbay, as well as from the NHS and Torbay Council alongside people who have never volunteered before.

United the community helpline has become a force to be reckoned with and it has been able to keep the most important thing as its focus, and that is the people – whether it has been the people giving or the people receiving help.

It is said of volunteering that it is a great way to get experience (true); to gain new or use existing skills (true). It is also said that it is a great way of meeting new people (virtually true) and of making a big difference in your community (absolutely true).

Some of our volunteers are now returning to their new 'normal' and have had to give up their regular 'on call' status, but the vast majority of them tell us that they will continue to volunteer in whatever way they can.

In the words of one of our volunteers, Bob Ward: "Even when I get back to work and things begin to return to whatever normal is, I will continue to volunteer, I will always find time for that."

This week is Volunteers' Week and a perfect time to say a massive thank you to each and every one of you.

We commissioned Geoff 'The Sandman' Ward to create one of his magnificent artworks on the beach in your honour, and we like to think that the extra 'l' that appeared in the word volunteer represents all the love that has been shown over the last few weeks. THANK YOU.

help

# Normal is a difficult word to define right now 10 June 2020

David Gledhill

## **NORMAL is a difficult word to define right now, except to say if your life is anywhere near normal, then you are in a tiny minority.**

As lockdown restrictions lift, it has meant for some greater freedoms allowing more outdoor life and more socialising in higher numbers.

For others, it has brought closer the opportunity to return to work, albeit in an unfamiliar way, socially distanced from colleagues and customers alike.

Transport companies are even reintroducing the idea of holidays, and here in Torbay, we are eyeing the prospect with excitement and trepidation in equal measure.

Tourism and council chiefs are preparing to promote Torbay's Responsible Riviera, urging people to respect guidelines and follow social distancing, which would help reassure locals about the influx of people.

But for thousands of others, there is currently no prospect of normal life, and so it is imperative that the Torbay Helpline on 01803 446022 will remain available for them for as long as necessary.

And that is why we are launching a Crowdfunder to help with the running costs of this essential service, which launched twelve weeks ago.

If you are one of the lucky ones, you will not have had to pick up the phone to ask for help, but thousands have (to date we have dealt with approaching 9000 calls). Here are a few facts about why it is so important to so many.

The Torbay Community Coronavirus Helpline was set up a week before the UK went into lockdown on March 23rd 2020.

Its aim was to provide support and advice for vulnerable people in the towns of Brixham, Paignton and Torquay, ensuring no one went hungry, no one went without their essential medications, and no one was left alone and isolated.

In the first 75 days of operation, it dealt with more than 8,000 calls - at its peak, we received 350 calls in one day - and we were able to respond to both requests for help and offers of help promptly.

The Helpline was the result of an unprecedented coming together of prominent charities and statutory bodies in Torbay, who each provided their expertise to ensure no questions to the helpline went unanswered.

These partners also provided the staff for the phone lines with teams from Torbay Community Development Trust, Age UK Torbay, Healthwatch Torbay, Brixham Does Care and Citizens Advice Torbay, working alongside Torbay Council and Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust, making it possible to offer practical help as well as expertise across a broad spectrum of needs.

Initially, the lines were available for 12 hours a day, seven days a week, but as demand lessened, those hours have been reduced on the main number of 01803 446022 to 10am to 6pm Monday to Friday and 9.30am - 12.30pm on Saturdays.

Although demand has reduced, we are still receiving on average 100 calls a day, rising to nearer 200 calls a day around Government announcements. Some of the callers have complex needs requiring more time and specialist responses.

However, we are also aware that as most people come out of lockdown, there will be those that will remain isolated because they are being shielded or are reluctant to come out of isolation because of other health issues.

The government says it will now regularly assess whether it is possible for the shielding guidance to be eased further in England, based on the latest scientific advice.

The next review will take place next week, and the government will then write to everyone on the shielded patient list with information about the next steps of the shielding advice and the support available to them.

The decision to go outside is yours. If you do decide to go out, the best way to protect yourself is to keep the number of visits and outings to a minimum.

We intend to keep the helpline open for as long as is necessary and we are grateful to our many volunteers who are making that possible, and that is why we are asking for you to help fund it. We have seen unprecedented kindness in the last few months - people volunteering in their hundreds to help their neighbours - and we hope that can continue as we move forward..

We will continue to provide whatever services are needed to ensure those that remain behind closed doors are not forgotten and we will continue to encourage our fantastic volunteers to remain with them wherever possible.

If you can, please go to: [www.crowdfunder.co.uk/torbay-helpline](http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/torbay-helpline). All contributions, no matter how small will be appreciated by our fabulous community. Thank you.  
#TorbayKind

freedoms

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# We have some fabulous people in the Bay

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17 June 2020

David Gledhill

## **WE HAVE some fabulous people here in the Bay who have stepped up to help their neighbours over the last few weeks.**

One of the privileges of this job is that I get to talk to them and to convince them that their stories are worth sharing with others and that isn't always easy.

More often than not, our conversations start with words to the effect that what they have done is not that special or that anyone would have done it were they able. They genuinely have no real inkling of how important their efforts have been.

I have written it before in this column that we knew we had some strong and resilient communities across the Bay, but even we have been surprised by how strong and how resilient.

People like Lesley Bullock from Foxhole, who as one of the shielded, most vulnerable, was determined to do something for others, despite not being able to leave her home.

Instead, for the last 12 weeks, she has been picking up the phone for more than 18 hours a week to speak to nine people, offering the hand of friendship and the reassurance of a friendly voice.

A few weeks ago, I met (virtually of course) a man we have come to refer to as a 'super' volunteer; not that Bob Ward would appreciate the addition of the super, he just thinks he is doing what needs to be done.

But Rita Thomson, on the other hand, would happily use the word super to describe him because she has been helped out by Bob since the beginning of April. A neck injury has prevented her doing either her shopping or her gardening, so Bob does it.

And those acts of kindness, what we call #TorbayKind are happening in communities across the Bay, each and every day. To put it in context, I have had a look back at the work of the Helpline since it started way back on March 16th.

More than 9000 calls have been made to the Torbay Community Coronavirus Helpline to teams of five dealing with, on average, 100 calls a day and at its peak, 350 calls in a day.

A rapid response team of community builders, wellbeing coordinators and volunteers have dealt with more than

2300 requests for help from people who have run out of food or medication.

In total, nearly 750 people from across the Bay have come forward to volunteer and another 50 have set up Good Neighbour schemes to keep in touch with people living nearby.

Calls continue to run at around 100 a day from people needing help and people offering help and 450 volunteers have so far been matched to support people in need who live in their neighbourhoods.

The majority of volunteers, whether they be shopping, collecting prescriptions or making befriending phone calls once matched, have remained as volunteers for the duration of the crisis.

Some of the more unusual requests for help have included transporting urine samples between doctors surgeries and patient homes. Others have been more refined, with people seeking a few home comforts like sparkling water, a duvet cover, jelly and ice cream, a roast dinner, some very brand specific hand cream and that lockdown staple, hair dye. Our call takers have even been asked advice on protocol for attending a funeral during the crisis.

The Helpline is an unprecedented coming together of staff and volunteers from key charities across Torbay including the Torbay Community Development Trust, Age UK Torbay, Healthwatch Torbay, Citizens Advice Torbay and Brixham Does Care working alongside Torbay

Council and Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust, each offering their own area of expertise.

As the crisis has progressed, the calls, whilst fewer, have become more complex and now provide triage support for callers with mental health issues as well as acting as a referral service for the Torbay Food Alliance.

The Torbay Food Alliance, a group of 12 organisations supported by the council, the NHS and TCDT, have so far delivered 4105 food parcels and 19,729 ready-made meals to families and individuals across the Bay, as well as 690 emergency meal kits for schools. That is the equivalent of 80,000 meals.

\*The helpline number which continues to be staffed from 10am to 6pm, Monday to Friday and 9.30am to 12.30pm on Saturdays is 01803 446022.

Amazing what a community can do when it comes together. As mentioned earlier, that is #TorbayKind

give

# Would you be a Good Neighbour?

24 June 2020

Tracey Cabache

**OVER the past few weeks we have covered in this column fantastic examples of how neighbours have been helping each other out during the Covid crisis.**

It reminds me of a conversation I had some six years ago with an older lady in Paignton. At the time, we were asking people what would make Torbay a better place to live. This lovely lady told me how she would very much like to go back to the times of war.

Slightly confused, and with some trepidation, I asked her to be a bit more specific – did she really want a third world war? ‘No,’ she said ‘I just want to bring back that feeling of community, the time when we all helped each other out, when everyone knew everyone on their street and we didn’t fear to ask for help...or to offer it’.

Well, lovely lady in Paignton, we have taken very big step in that direction over the past three months. During the height of the pandemic, our worlds got a little smaller – the people we would mostly see were those on our own streets. We have had conversations with people we have never spoken to before. We have worked together to make sure everyone was fine. In the words of someone much cleverer than I – out of adversity came opportunity.

Now, as our ‘new normal’ begins to emerge wouldn’t it be great if we retained the connections with our neighbours?

At the start of lockdown, we offered people the chance to be a micro-volunteer in their own street with the support of the Community Coronavirus Helpline. More than 50 streets signed up and have been engaged in both practical things and social (distanced) activities. We are now inviting more people to jump on board with a newly designed Good Neighbours scheme across Torquay and Paignton and in partnership with YES in Brixham.

Through the scheme, support will be given to individuals or groups of people who want to bring their neighbours together. We can offer ideas, signpost to information and even provide small grants to streets or blocks, who just want to become or stay connected.

We can provide advice on setting up neighbourhood facebook groups, WhatsApp groups and telephone trees. On street socials, socially distanced BBQs or even coffee mornings by zoom. Join in with National Cream Tea Day on the 26th June (see below), celebrate the 50th

Anniversary of Glastonbury from the 25th-29th June or get the kids on your street involved with National Insects Week from 22nd-28th June. Insects are part of your community too!

To join our scheme, you just need to register to be a good neighbour at <https://bit.ly/goodneighbourtorbay> or call the Community Helpline on 01803 446022 (Monday-Friday 10am – 6pm or Saturday 9.30am to 12.30pm). Your local Community Builder will be in touch with a pack of information full of ideas.

We will be sharing what’s worked between the streets/blocks in the scheme and also linking you into other relevant activities happening across the country. There has never been a better time to get to know your neighbours.

While the need for practical support may reduce over the next few weeks – many of your neighbours may be shielding for longer, many might need some encouragement to leave the house after such a long period of containment. Many may just need to know that there is someone who can help if they need it.

More importantly, many of your neighbours may have things to offer – but they are just a little bit modest to share that they love to bake and are rather good at it.

That they are a dab hand at painting – but have nothing left to paint! That they love walking dogs but do not have one. Could you be the person/people that brings them together? If so, register today.

If your street has already been coming together then you may want to nominate those who have made that happen, and your street/block, for a Good Neighbour

Cream Tea. Sponsored by the Co-op – your neighbourhood store, there are 12 cream teas for 12 streets/blocks to share (from a two metre distance). Just drop your nomination into any Co-op store in Torquay,

Paignton and Brixham, email to [info@torbaycdt.org.uk](mailto:info@torbaycdt.org.uk) or call it into the Community Helpline on the number above by the close of Friday. Any excuse to get together!

fantastic



generosity

# Spontaneous acts of kindness

6 July 2020

David Gledhill

## **A FEW months ago, as the coronavirus crisis began to bite, we began to see spontaneous acts of kindness taking place across the Bay and coined the hashtag #TorbayKind.**

News of acts of kindness trickled in at first but within weeks it had gathered momentum, and we were deluged with stories of neighbours helping neighbours, friends going the extra mile and particularly poignant, strangers stepping up to help people they had never met.

Soon we were using the phrase #Torbaykind on a daily basis – often several times a day – as society changed in an unprecedented way to meet the huge challenge it faced.

Some have compared it to a Wartime spirit. But that was different on all sorts of levels. This took a different type of resolve - not even during the darkest days of World War II were people confined to their homes 24 hours a day, with pubs and cafes closed and streets deserted around the clock.

Last weekend as pubs and restaurants reopened in the first steps toward a 'new normal', it was coincidentally the end of our contest to find good neighbours across the Bay, which revealed all too clearly how much kindness there is in our part of the world.

During the crisis, we had more than 50 people sign up for our Good Neighbour scheme, but we knew that those that signed up were just the tip of the iceberg, with others preferring to organise themselves.

Some spotted the potential problems even before lockdown became a reality and had already dropped leaflets through doors to enable them to collect telephone numbers allowing them to keep in touch with each other through telephone trees or WhatsApp groups.

New friendships have been forged and communities have come together in a way that bodes well for the future, even if some of the people involved have yet to put a face to the voice because they continue to shield.

What has come through time and again are the lengths people have been prepared to go, to help each other. Nothing has been too much trouble.

Lawns have been mowed, prescriptions have been collected, food shopped for, but what has been at the core of everything has been an overwhelming kindness, a kindness that has been acknowledged and appreciated.

People came together in whatever resourceful way they could – over the garden wall at the end of the driveway or during the weekly, sometimes thunderous claps for carers and NHS workers.

In Brixham, residents of Higher Furzesham established a WhatsApp group a week before lockdown which continues to operate today and has been used for everything from advice on how to assemble bunk beds to looking after the children of one of the neighbours who had to go to hospital for an emergency eye operation.

In Preston, residents of Higher Polsham Road have had about as much fun as is possible during lockdown with everything from VE Celebrations to quizzes. They have even raised money for Rowcroft Hospice and Paignton Zoo.

They are now looking forward to the street party to beat the six that have gone before, themed with Back to the '80s, Glitz and Glamour and On the Beach to name but a few.

Over in Shiphay, neighbours knew just where to go when realising they needed a bit of exercise to get them through the lockdown – 88-year-old keep fit instructor Sylvia Myers.

Sylvia has been taking exercise classes for just shy of 60 years and thought nothing of leading her street, Fletcher Close in weekly 40 minutes classes attended by everyone of every age, all taking part, socially distanced, at the end of their driveways.

What comes through time and time again is the discovery that there are potential friends on the doorstep. People who have lived in the same place for years are meeting for the first time and discovering that they get on.

Friendships are being forged and, once made, will continue in the years to come.

The little kindnesses that make up a good neighbourhood will continue to be made long after this is all over, and we will remember where it all came from – a very special #TorbayKind.

Now all that remains for most of these neighbourly groups is the one big party that marks the day when everyone can mingle once again. It may be some time, but one thing is for sure, it will be worth waiting for.

If you and your neighbours want to set up your own group go to: [www.bit.ly/goodneighbourtorbay](http://www.bit.ly/goodneighbourtorbay).

friendships

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# The tourists are back

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15 July 2020

David Gledhill

## **The tourists are back, albeit in slightly lower numbers, the pubs are open, even though they are serving fewer people and restaurants and cafes are serving again though the footfall has had to be reduced.**

Along with the High Streets throwing open their doors and attractions welcoming back visitors, you could be forgiven for thinking that life is returning to 'normal.'

For some, it is a pale facsimile of what went before, particularly for those who have been able to take advantage to get out and sample the 'new normal' along with those that have been able to return to the workplace. But for many, many, others it isn't either a normal nor even a 'new normal' - not by a long chalk and for some, life continues much as it has done since lockdown was declared on March 23rd.

There are those that do not want to risk coming back out and there are those for whom life has changed forever – unemployment accompanied by seemingly insurmountable financial problems and, of course, we should always remember that there are those who have lost loved ones.

No number of Government announcements and changes of advice will make a difference for thousands of people who do not believe that returning to the 'new normal' is an option and for them the only real option is as an as yet to be invented vaccine.

Some are choosing to come out of lockdown to varying degrees – perhaps going out for walks in quiet places or visiting friends in the safety of their gardens, being careful never to close the gap within two metres.

Shopping, travelling by public transport or going into any building other than their own homes remains a no, no and it is not for anyone else to question their caution; they must be allowed to follow their own instincts and keep their own counsel.

Those are the people that we must not forget and those are the people that the Torbay Community Helpline on 01803 446022 will remain open to offer practical help and that will continue to include shopping and prescription collections just as it has done since it was set up four months ago.

We will continue to match our wonderful volunteers with people living nearby who can help with practical matters as well as providing friendship and support for people

who otherwise would be lonely and isolated. Our call handlers who have come from charities, statutory bodies from across the Bay to staff the lines initially for 12 hours a day, seven days a week, and they have learned on the hoof to provide all the support and guidance that has been necessary through these difficult times.

It seems only fair that each and every one of them gets a mention so that they can get the thanks that they deserve – volunteers: David Clayton, Wendy Arrowsmith, Charlotte Grimmering, Vicky Haggard, David Giles, Pat Teague, Jan Colley and June Pierce.

Step One Mental Health Charity: Maxine Myrie, Amy Erith, Sarah Stacey, Andrew Shankster, Peter Kowaldki, Caitlin Crocker; NHS Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Ysanne Wood, Jo Clinning; NHS Sensory, Disability Information Service, Nicola Osborne, Bevis Taylor and Jayne Morris.

Torbay Council Children's Services: Tia Richardson, Beth Freestone, Reza Cassim, Lucy Tunnicliff; Ellacombe Community Café's, David Ward & Sarah O'connor; Paul Bidwell from the Advocacy People; Pat Harris and Karen Marcellino from Healthwatch Torbay and Karen Armstrong from Together Church.

Age UK Torbay: Esther Gorrod, Rachel Coles, Sue Webb, Gwen Price, Jane Eastwood, Shaun Calloway, Carol Lemming, Helen Harman, Mandie Giles and Helen Ellis. And last but not least, TCDDT/AgeingWell Torbay/Positive

People and SENDIASS: Jess Slade, Gill Knight, Jo Ginger, Mark Smith, Neil Lawton, Katie Sowden, Natasha Talbot, Sam Bolton, Kelly Givens, Chris Forster, Sandra Harper, John Arcus, Matt Saunders, Jane Acton, Simon Sherbersky, and Robin Causley.

Everyone mentioned here has been on a steep learning curve, providing a friendly listening ear and being able to call on support for a host of issues, including mental health, finance and the foodbanks.

They in turn, have plugged into the hundreds of volunteers, triage professionals, the volunteer matchers and the rapid response team that were out on the ground queuing for and delivering food and medications throughout the crisis and for their selflessness in worrying and uncertain times, the whole of the Bay is grateful.

If you need help, don't hesitate – 01803 446022 from 10 am to 6 pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday mornings from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm.

OPEN

David Gledhill

## **AT THE END of next week, many of the services provided for people who are shielding will be withdrawn.**

Following Government advice, Torbay Council won't be checking in with you on a regular basis anymore and the food parcels and medicines will no longer be delivered, which for some people will be problematical.

Not everyone is happy about coming out of self-isolation and some will choose to remain shielded until a vaccine is developed, and that is where the Torbay Community Helpline will continue to provide the services it has since its launch on March 16th, a week before lockdown.

Our call handlers will remain available on 01803 446022 from 10 am to 6 pm, Monday to Friday and on Saturday mornings from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm providing support for people as long as people need it.

Since we launched the service – made possible by an unprecedented coming together of charities, organisations and statutory bodies - on March 16th, we have been taken aback by the number of people who have been offering to help their neighbours through difficult times.

To date, we have been contacted by more than 3,700 people from across the Bay who have made more than 11,500 calls that have lasted for more than 740 hours in total.

We received 2,363 different offers of help covering everything from doing someone's shopping, collecting their prescriptions, posting letters and parcels, walking dogs and telephone befriending.

Additionally, our rapid response team dealt with more than 2,700 requests for urgent help where people had run out of food altogether or were in urgent need of, sometimes, life-saving meds.

Most people who needed help and contacted us were aged between 55 and 94-years-old, but our lines were open to all, and we were on hand to help all vulnerable people regardless of age.

As the crisis developed and the stresses and strains of lockdown began to show, we were able to add to our support with triage into mental health services as well as more detailed financial advice for those who had lost their livelihoods.

We were also a part of the Torbay Food Alliance, a partnership between 12 foodbanks supported by the TCDT, Torbay Council and Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust, who together provided the equivalent of 130,000 meals in the first three months.

So although the Government sponsored food parcels will stop for now, for those who need them, we can continue to provide food parcels and, where needed, pre-cooked meals.

We have continued to develop our services through the Helpline since day one and we are now in the best position to support people who either do not want to come out of self isolation or are nervous about doing so.

We have volunteers ready to buddy up with people going out for the first time since the crisis began who will hopefully provide the advice and the confidence needed to take those first tentative steps.

Social distancing will, of course, be maintained at all times and people coming out of shielding have the option of wearing a yellow lanyard which signals that they are vulnerable and need to maintain a two-metre distance.

None of our services will be affected by the Government's decision to end shielding and we intend to keep the Torbay Community Helpline on 01803 446022 going because the last few months have shown that this is a new way of working that needs to be built upon.

Although various organisations in the Bay rubbed along happily enough before the crisis, COVID has provided the catalyst for a fresh approach – statutory bodies (especially councils and the NHS), charities, volunteers have now proved they can work together to great effect.

We have stood and clapped the NHS, but in doing so we were also acknowledging the extraordinary work that has gone on in other agencies to ensure the wellbeing of vulnerable people across the Bay.

Four months ago, Torbay Community Development Trust, Age UK Torbay, Healthwatch Torbay, Brixham Does Care and Citizen's Advice Torbay came together to deliver the Helpline without which things might have been very different.

Since then, we have been boosted by the expertise of many other organisations, all of whom are looking forward to continuing to work together in the future. Several hashtags have been coined over the last few weeks all of which bear repeating: #nevermoreneeded #communitiestogether, #buildbackbetter and, perhaps most appropriately #TorbayKind. Long may it last.

deliver

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# Streets thronging with shoppers and tourists

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29 July 2020

David Gledhill

## **TORBAY is getting busy again with the streets thronged with shoppers and tourists – so much so you could be forgiven for thinking things were back to normal.**

But we should not be lulled into a false sense of security and it is important to remember that not everyone is back out and about shopping, visiting cafes, restaurants and pubs or visiting each other.

Thousands of residents are choosing to remain shielded as much as possible and advice letters containing bright yellow lanyards which warn that the wearer is still social distancing have been dropping through letterboxes this week.

The lanyards will hopefully serve as a helpful reminder to others that some people are choosing to remain as isolated as is practically possible until a vaccine is created and we are finally given the all clear.

Please watch out for them, and please respect their wish to maintain a social distance.

The lanyard will be worn by the most vulnerable as they strive to find their own version of a new normal and for some wearers, it will be the first time that they have ventured out since lockdown began.

The Torbay Community Helpline (01803 446022) is still available for those that need it and we will continue to put people offering help in touch with those that need it for as long as they need it.

We will continue to ensure that food shopping is done, that medicines continue to be collected, and ensure that willing local volunteers cover many other chores.

All across the Bay, people are coming up with creative ways to keep in touch with each other and to find alternatives to the usual meet and mingle events such as coffee mornings, music evenings and even book clubs.

For those with access to a computer, a great deal is going online with regular Zoom calls, Facetime and Skype video calls, filling the gaps wherever possible.

One thriving group who used to meet regularly for catch-ups at the Dolphin Pub in St Marychurch are now sharing stories and supporting each other via weekly Zoom calls set up by their Community Builders.

Betty, one of the participants, is learning new skills as well as catching up with friends and having a laugh. Not a substitute for eating fish and chips and having a drink face to face, but a fun and sensible alternative.

“I have enjoyed our chats on Zoom and the laughs it provokes as we hear people saying 'She needs to unmute', 'She needs to click on video' or 'We can only see your head' etc etc.

“It's been a revelation to me and I am learning new skills, slowly but surely., so that's a bonus. It's great to see everyone to find out how they're coping and to listen to each other's problems, joys and miseries,” she said.

And that is the challenge for all of us in these peculiar times and it is important that we all find ways of keeping connected until better solutions can be found.

Community Builders who have worked tirelessly through this crisis (and continue to do so) have been checking in with people across the Bay to make sure that as others start going out and socialising again, that no-one gets left out.

The Torbay Over 50's Assembly has gone online to resume their work championing older members of the local population and are looking to ensure they have a voice as we begin the process of rebuilding our communities.

The same goes for the Ageing Well Festival, which was due to be held at the Riviera Centre in Torquay on Saturday, October 24th and is now out of the question, but that is not to say there should not be an annual celebration of ageing.

Instead, we are planning something we have not had to try before – the Ageing Well Festival @Home when we plan to bring the best bits of our festival – music, talks, workshops and advice into your living room.

And yes, we even aim to get you up and dancing in the privacy of your own home – not the same, but great fun nonetheless.

Over the next few months, we aim to record sessions that will then be broadcast online and via Riviera FM (107.9) throughout the day. It won't be the same, but it will be fun, so pop it into your diary.

Hopefully we will see you there (virtually).

security

# Tricky this coronavirus

5 August 2020

David Gledhill

## **TRICKY this coronavirus – just when you think it is (relatively safe) to go out and about it comes up and bites you where it hurts the most.**

Last week saw the official lifting of shielding by the Government, which ironically coincided with a strengthening of the rules regarding socialising in as much as you are no longer allowed to meet in each others' homes. Let's hope that is enough to reverse a trend in the numbers that were creeping upwards.

For thousands of people in Torbay, it makes no difference what the Government say, they will remain shielded until such a time as there is a vaccine and the all-clear is finally sounded.

It is with the shielded in mind that the Helpline on 01803 446022 continues to operate six days a week between 10am and 6pm, Monday to Friday and 9.30am to 12.30pm on Saturdays, and our team is on hand to ensure no one in the Bay becomes isolated, goes lonely or is left without food or meds.

We also have a plan in place should the virus spike and we are forced to return to a form of lockdown as has happened in other areas of the country. Our team is ready; we just hope that we are not needed.

This Saturday, August 8th, our Rapid Response team - an amazing bunch of people helping the most vulnerable in the Bay from the beginning of the crisis - will stand down for the first time in 146 days.

Hopefully, it won't be needed again, but over the last few months, members of the Rapid Response team have put themselves out there at a time when others were locked down or self-isolating. They responded when there was no one else, and they have turned out more than 2500 times, at the peak up to 30 times a day.

Initially, the Rapid Response team was made up of our community builders, who were quickly joined by well-being coordinators from Age UK Torbay who took to the streets when only key workers were allowed out.

They shopped for food, collected prescriptions, joining long snaking queues outside pharmacies and supermarkets at a time when personal protection equipment was not available.

Despite the shortage of PPE, they continued to make themselves available for others, even as speculation about the spread of the virus and, in particular, viral loading raged in the media. They put others before themselves at a time when no one could be sure of the consequences.

Later they were joined by volunteers who came forward to help their neighbours, with sometimes some pretty odd requests – like delivering medical supplies and samples between surgeries and patients.

But they also did not balk when the requests were specific, like the one for a specific brand of sparkling mineral water or another for apple crumble and a pint of milk.

They went above and beyond and the rapid responders delivered with a smile - although most of the people they dealt with won't know it because when deliveries were made they were safely behind their own closed door.

Despite the long hours (caused in part by long queues for everything) they showed an extraordinary commitment to getting it right. Like the time one Helpline caller was badly in need of medication, but it was not available at her local pharmacy – our rapid responder travelled around Paignton until she found what she needed and then liaised with the surgery to get the prescription sent there.

The thank yous have been numerous and heartfelt, but in the same way as we named those that staffed the Helpline it is only right that we acknowledge the Rapid Responders:

Community Builders: Rosemary Clarke, Victoria Campbell, Seema Patel, Ash Rangasamy, Nina Cooper, Gill Knight, Ruth Tshoukas, Christine Durrant, Jennie Langridge,

Leah Whitcher, Tara Acton, Dan Best and Sally Farrant. Age UK Torbay: Gwen Price, Esther Garrod and Rachel Coles.

Children's Services, Torbay Council: Reza Cassim and Lucy Tunncliffe

Together Church: Peter Clayton, Brian Armstrong, Peter De Feu, Jill De Feu, Margaret Blakie, Chris Garner and Ally Salm.

Volunteers: Andrew Johnston, Tanya Alford, Bob Ward, Nicky Randall and Ben Long

Crafty Fox: Karen Parker Anna Murray, Jeff Hill and Brett Cooper.

And the bus drivers who delivered carers' PPE: David Mufford and Colin Warner.

Thank you to each and every one of you. Without you, things in the Bay could have been very different over the last few months. You are #TorbayKind.

safe

# People are continuing to self shield

12 August 2020

David Gledhill

**IF YOU ARE one of the lucky ones who is no longer self-isolating, you could be forgiven for thinking that everyone else is out and about too.**

After all, Torbay is busy, particularly given the recent good weather, but what you can't see are those that are choosing to continue to shield or are choosing to avoid crowds of people, even in the open air.

With that in mind, our community builders have been on hand to buddy up with people who remain nervous about leaving the safety of their homes having perhaps not left their homes since the start of lockdown nearly five months ago.

The idea of the buddy system is to accompany anyone who might want to go to the shops, visit a tourist attraction or simply go for a walk in the open air - not easy when there are so many tourists around.

Bright yellow lanyards have been provided for those who want to continue to social distance. Hopefully, they will serve as a useful reminder to everyone when they are out and about.

Please watch out for them and respect the message.

But for some after more than 150 days of self-isolation that is not enough and as a result, some public places and tourists attractions are opening up at set times only for people who are shielding (and where appropriate their carers).

Community builders or volunteers are on hand at each of the venues to act as stewards to ensure that those that have been shielding are able to exercise in peace and to help ensure they remain separate from others, keeping risk to an absolute minimum.

## **In Torquay:**

Our Space at the Acorn Centre, Lummaton Cross - Wednesdays 2pm to 4pm

Steps Cross, off Teignmouth Road – Thursdays 10am to 12noon

Cricketfield Community Garden, Cricketfield Road – Fridays 10am to 12noon

Tessier Gardens (adults only), Lindridge Road, adjacent to Furrough Cross Church - Tuesdays 10.30am-12.30pm and Thursday 1pm to 3pm.

Kitson Park, Cadewell Lane – Tuesdays 11am to 12noon

Brewery Park (Top), Lower Ellacombe Church Road - Mondays 2pm to 4pm and Thursdays 10am to 12noon

Millennium Copse, between Chilcote Close and Rowley Road, St Marychurch – Wednesday 11am to 1pm

## **In Paignton:**

Preston Gardens, Torquay Road – Tuesdays 10.30am to 12.30pm

Hollicombe Park – Thursdays 2pm to 4pm

Young's Park near the bandstand, Goodrington – Tuesdays 11am to 1pm

Palace Avenue Gardens – Wednesdays 10.30am to 12.30pm

St Michaels Field (with play park), St Michael's Road - Mondays 2pm to 4pm

Stanley Gardens (with play park), – Thursdays 2pm to 4pm

Primley Park (with play park), off Totnes Road – Fridays 11am to 1pm

## **In Brixham:**

Bonsey Gardens, off North Furzeham Road – Mondays 2 to 4pm

St Mary's Park (with play park) – Thursdays 10 to 12noon  
Shoalstone Picnic Area – Tuesdays 10am to 12noon

## **Also open:**

Kents Cavern is offering pre-booked tours only for a maximum of ten people, and special tour slots for vulnerable groups. Tel: 01803 215136

Cockington Court : the two main galleries and visitor welcome point at Cockington Court will be open on Wednesday afternoons (1 to 4:30pm) following a deep clean for people who have been shielding. The Seven Dials cafe is open for takeaways with plenty of outside space to enjoy. Tel: 01803 607230

Torre Abbey: The Abbey will undergo a deep clean whilst closed each Monday, and then will just be open just to those who have been shielding each Tuesday. Tel: 01803 293593

Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust TCCT has created special guidance on how to safely visit their sites such as Berry Head and Saltern Cove, including a COVID Countryside Code offering advice on staying safe when visiting Trust sites. Tel: 01803 520022

Artizan Gallery, Lucius St and Fleet Walk, Torquay Artizan Gallery is offering morning bookings exclusively to vulnerable groups/individuals 9 to 11am every weekday they open and 9 to 10am on Saturdays. Tel: 07762 921571 Reach Outdoors, Seashore Centre, Tanners Road, Goodrington

For fans of paddle boarding and kayaking, Reach Outdoors are offering an early bird slot between 9 and 10am to people who have been shielding. Private group sessions for a 'shielding circle' of up to five people are also available for up to 3 hours. Tel: 01803 524950

If you require any more information – please contact the venue directly, but if you need more information about the stewarded public spaces and the buddy system, please call the Torbay Community Helpline on 018043 446022.

# forgiven

# We have to get creative

19 August 2020

David Gledhill

**IT HAS BEEN said many times in the few months that we live in interesting times and to achieve, what used to be 'normal' and commonplace, we have to get creative.**

For the last five months, Ageing Well Torbay events have been in abeyance as we instead focussed all our efforts on making sure no one was isolated and no one went without food or medications during the coronavirus crisis.

For obvious reasons, there have been no public meetups, no creative workshops, no exercise programmes – indoors or outdoors – no sing-alongs, no dancing, no coffee mornings, no afternoon tea and no sports.

We are beginning to put some things onto Zoom and encouraging as many people as possible (within Government guidelines) to support each other, whether that is meeting in small groups, online or on the phone.

We had, of course, planned to give a flavour of everything Ageing Well Torbay stands for and supports at the annual celebration of ageing that is the Ageing Well Festival, in October at the Riviera Centre but again that has had to be put on a back burner.

None of us has a crystal ball, particularly when it comes to this virus, but hopefully, we will be in a position to go ahead with the Festival next April as long as it is deemed safe to bring 2000 people together in one place.

All of which got us thinking. We are not the type of people to give up when faced with a problem; on the contrary, it makes us all the more determined to find a solution, as have on many occasions since the programme started more than five years ago.

Across the Bay, there are examples of groups that have been set up because that is what people wanted. Our Community Builders were on hand to recognise the demand and help overcome a few obstacles to make it a reality.

We have helped set up everything from flash mob dance groups, to book clubs, from yoga classes to walking groups, from afternoon tea groups to railway modellers and from lunch clubs to mix and mingle sessions in Brixham, Torquay and Paignton.

It is what we do best, ensuring that everyone over 50 gets to celebrate their ageing, doing what they love to do.

Which brings us back to the Ageing Well Festival – a celebration of ageing where we showcase everything that the older generation has to offer, all in one day and all under one roof.

And that is what we are going to do again this year. Nearly. We will celebrate ageing and we will showcase everything that the older generation has to offer, all in one day and here is the difference – all under one roof. Your roof.

On October 24th, when should all have been at the Riviera Centre in Torquay, we will be @Home – virtually together to watch, listen and perhaps take part in a series of events being beamed into your living room or wherever you listen to the radio or perch in front of the computer

This week we started recording a series of talks, exercise classes, demonstrations and showcases that will be broadcast via Facebook, YouTube or played out on Torbay's very own community radio station, Riviera FM on 107.9.

It is a huge and complex undertaking, but one that we hope will fill the gap caused by COVID-19 and prove all our resilience in the face of adversity. And to pull it off successfully, we need an audience, so please pop the date in your diary and help us spread the word.

The line up is by no means final, but we plan to bring you the very best the talent of the Bay has to offer between 10am and midday and between 1pm and 3pm – all compered by presenters from Riviera FM Brenda Loosemore, a popular speaker at previous festivals, took to the stage in an empty auditorium at the Palace Theatre in Paignton to pay tribute to and reminisce on the life of the Queen. Not to be missed, I assure you.

Over the coming weeks we are planning on getting more talks on tape. We will also be recording dance and exercise classes, producing a series of 'how to' videos and be taking you on tours of the Brixham Battery and Torre Abbey.

See you there. October 24th. For more details, watch this space and go to: [ageingwelltorbay.com/awf20/](http://ageingwelltorbay.com/awf20/)

celebrate

# Reflecting on the effects of our actions

26 August 2020

David Gledhill

**IN THIS BUSY life, it is rare to get the chance to reflect on the effects of our actions and take the opportunity to blow our own trumpets.**

However, this is one of those occasions and having just read through some of the responses we received to our survey about what people thought about our hastily set up Torbay Community Coronavirus Helpline, I feel incredibly proud of my colleagues.

Never before have charities across the Bay come together in the way that they did when we first realised the severity of what was to come as COVID 19 began to wreak havoc back in March.

We knew we would need to step up and we knew we would need to be ready for anything, and as a result, we set up the Helpline with staff working seven days a week, 12 hours a day.

We set up rotas, purloining staff from Torbay Community Development Trust, Age UK Torbay, Brixham Does Care, Healthwatch Torbay and Citizens Advice Torbay and threw them in at the deep end.

We had no idea what to expect but knew as the lockdown was announced on March 23rd that we were as ready as we would ever be, which is amazing given that there was no handbook, no experience to fall back on and no prior lessons to be learned.

The calls came in thick and fast, peaking at 350 in one day from people at best anxious, at worst frightened, wondering how they were going to do their shopping or collect their essential prescriptions.

We learned as we went along, concentrating on helping those in need and recruiting volunteers who were offering help and quickly set up a rapid response team to deal with the most urgent issues.

Alongside that, we joined forces with Torbay Council and the Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust to help 12 foodbanks across the Bay to work together to source and distribute much-needed food.

And as the days turned into weeks and the weeks became months, we developed a triage service that dealt with immediate food and pharmaceutical needs, alongside mental health issues and financial support.

In five months, we received around 12000 calls, and we have dealt with more than 3750 people and our rapid response team turned out on more than 2700 occasions. And the calls are still coming – not as frequently as they did, but none are any less important.

And that is why in our survey, we asked the question do you think the Helpline should continue, and the overwhelming response was a resounding yes because respondents recognised that it had got things done.

Or in their own words: “I think it should continue. I think that most people have been very kind in this crisis. There are guardian Angels in this world, and this crisis has very much shown it. We were very grateful having help”

And another: “I think that the prompt liaison of all the groups/agencies involved in setting up such a smooth-running operation, advertising it widely and making it successful from the outset was an outstanding achievement.”

Finally, of the nearly 280 favourable comments we received, the one that I liked most: “Good community connections - Support offered without tons of bureaucracy (!) Common-sense action.”

The survey also asked if people were proud of the way that Torbay had responded to the crisis and an incredible 96.27% said yes – again neatly summed up by one person: “The range of services provided was amazing, we are very lucky to be living in the Bay; many other areas in the Country had nothing like this.”

It is easy to criticise and it is not a British thing to boast, but today I make an exception because I feel here in the Bay we all have something to boast about because we got it right.

Not one hundred per cent, of course not, who possibly could, but in the main we read it right and we reacted accordingly, not just as charities and organisations but as individuals, as good neighbours and as volunteers.

No matter what this nasty virus still has to throw at us, we got this bit about as right as we could and we should allow ourselves a bit of a boast because we deserve it.

Shout it from the rooftops if you want, and as we move forward into whatever the new normal is, let's build on it because we were #TorbayKind and we should be proud of it.

opportunity



active

# Doing what we can to help the community

2 September 2020

*Matt Saunders*

## **SINCE late March, we here at Torbay Community Development Trust have been doing what we can to help the community during the ongoing pandemic.**

We established the Torbay Community Helpline as a means of providing swift assistance for those stuck self-isolating at home, who were in urgent need of food, shopping, prescription medication, social contact, advice, and guidance...all essentials many of us took for granted well before lockdown began, an attitude in many cases which seems to have not changed.

From the get-go, the helpline has greatly relied on the cooperation and help only the community could provide. From day one, hundreds of people came forward and volunteered their services, to help their neighbours during a time of rapid and unpredictable change, full of challenges to overcome.

Volunteers have been involved in so many levels of the helpline's structure, it is simply unthinkable to imagine how it could have run without the hard work put in by residents of Brixham, Paignton and Torquay, who have come to us from all walks of life.

However, over the past couple of months, many efforts have been made to regain some sense of "normality" – lockdowns easing, taking trips out, being able to go back to work, seeing friends, family, and co-workers in person again (albeit at a bit more than arm's length, hopefully nothing personal there).

For the helpline, this has meant many of our fantastic volunteers are now facing the reality of returning to their previous lives – returning to work, focusing more on family and friends, taking a well-earned break from hours, days, weeks, even months of non-stop volunteering.

While some things may be returning to a vague semblance of the pre-pandemic life, it is undeniable that for most of us, things will never be the same again. Realising this, the decision has been made for the Torbay Community Helpline to continue indefinitely, with plans for it to evolve into a point of contact for most, if not all community, voluntary and charity services in Torbay.

For this to happen, we still need the community's help. That will always be a consistent fact in how the helpline operates...we cannot have a Torbay Community Helpline, without community involvement.

We are now asking once again for the people of Torbay to step up, as you were so quick to do months ago, so those who cannot as quickly let down their guard can get the vital help they need.

We are currently asking for people to lend a hand as either a call handler, or a rapid responder.

The helpline's call handlers, all based at home around the bay, will need to be somewhat computer literate (we're not seeking the next Bill Gates or Steve Jobs, just anyone with a basic understanding of how to use a computer... although any geniuses would be greatly appreciated too) be patient, have a listening ear for discussing a person's needs and concerns, as well as a practical approach to helping others, plus knowledge of local support services and organisations would be beneficial too.

Our team of rapid responders usually do better if they own their own set of wheels, as many drive to pick up the likes of shopping and prescription medication, dropping them off on doorsteps for our callers requesting help (however owning a car or vehicle is essential, as we will assign your duties accordingly).

For both roles, training, guidance, resources, and peer support are available, with staff from Torbay Community Development Trust, and our partners (from organisations including Brixham Does Care, Age UK Torbay, Healthwatch Torbay, Citizens Advice Torbay, the Torbay Advice Network, Homemaker Southwest and What's Your Problem, all working alongside Torbay Council and the Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust) all on hand to lend advice, support, management, and assistance.

If you are interested in helping us out for two to four hours a week, and more importantly – helping out your neighbours, from all around Torbay, please do get in touch – call the Torbay Community Helpline on 01803 446022, or use the online format [www.bit.ly/torbayhelpline](http://www.bit.ly/torbayhelpline).

peer support

# Challenges faced by the voluntary sector

9 September 2020

*Robin Causley*

**THE RECENT SURVEY conducted by Torbay Community Development Trust of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations in the Bay, provided us with comprehensive details of the issues and challenges faced by the sector since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March.**

Some parts of the sector have been hit harder than others, with Arts and Culture, Sporting organisations, and Community Centres having had their activities severely restricted by social distancing. The prolonged continuation of these measures not only threatening the future of some (along with the venues and amenities they provide) this could also have detrimental impacts on community cohesion and the general well-being of local people.

In other parts of the sector, the loss of the ability of groups to connect, support and engage face-to-face is mentioned by many. Such interactions are at the very heart of what so much of the VCSE sector does, and beneficiaries have been very concerned about not being able to access their service or activity in this way.

However, the sector has demonstrated a high level of ingenuity and adaptability, providing support in various innovative ways.

New ways of reaching beneficiaries have included virtual, online and various telephone/mobile contact.

Digital inclusion is, however, an issue for many groups wishing to communicate effectively with the most vulnerable.

There were (and are) still plenty of groups and mutual aid volunteers providing direct support to vulnerable people in their homes, however.

The speed at which many front-line organisations responded in this crisis, providing essential (and sometimes) emergency support to self-isolating and shielding vulnerable people, helped take pressure off local statutory services, which would almost certainly not have been able to cope, had the sector not acted so swiftly and decisively.

Despite reduced capacity due to the loss of volunteers and staff furloughing, the sector has shown remarkable resilience and the ability to step up to the challenges it faced and continues to face in Torbay.

Effective partnership working has been a feature particularly in respect of the Torbay Community Helpline, Torbay Food Alliance and local Advice sector.

However, the loss of income is and will continue to be a major issue.

Traditional grant income, trading, charity shop income, donations, community fundraising, events, ticket-sales, membership fees, and rental income, have all taken a big hit.

The additional costs of providing services in response to the pandemic have in some cases been covered or contributed to by emergency grant funding. However, only a few respondents had been able to access the various government grant schemes for businesses, and furloughing staff has been the only option.

Though the majority of those surveyed thought their organisation would survive in some shape or form, there was great uncertainty expressed about how the "new normal" will look and whether some of their core activities could continue.

Many were expecting and now experiencing significantly increased demand for their support. Mental health, finance and benefits, unemployment, domestic abuse, homelessness, family and food poverty were all identified as areas where more support will be expected of their organisation.

The Charity Finance Group has recently issued a report that states that 58% of charities nationally are to cut back services, costing the sector as many as 60,000 jobs.

Job losses on such a scale will result in a painful contraction of charity provision at the very moment thousands more are expected to turn to them for help.

VCSE sector activities and organisations have demonstrated through their response to the pandemic that they are the glue that keeps communities together. They want to play their part in the recovery, but every day society is close to losing huge capacity at the heart of our communities.

Navigating this period rests in part in getting more resources into the sector, from government, from existing funders and from members of the public.

But it also rests on reversing the public policy neglect the sector has suffered from over many years.

That's particularly true if civil society is to play the pivotal role that it should do in the country's recovery from the pandemic, helping to fulfil the Prime Minister's pledge to "Build Back Better".

For further information on funding and fundraising in the VCSE sector, I recommend visiting our website's funding section: [www.torbaycdt.org.uk/funding](http://www.torbaycdt.org.uk/funding)

collaboration

# The crisis continues to challenge us all

16 September 2020

David Gledhill

## **THE CORONAVIRUS crisis continues to challenge us all and organisations, businesses, schools and individuals, struggle to keep up with the latest advice.**

Just when you thought it was safe to meet in larger numbers, the virus spiked and we have been sent back to the drawing board when it comes to organising social get-togethers.

Picking a country to holiday in, other than here in the UK, is a guessing game with popular destinations being added and removed from the approved list on a weekly basis, but that is proving to be an advantage for Torbay as staycationers flock here.

For some, a feeling of relative normality is returning to their lives as more people are urged to return to the workplace, children to go back to school and students to travel to their universities.

Pubs and restaurants remain open, as do places of worship, but the rules within them have been tightened to allow a maximum of groups of six to socialise with nothing allowed over and above that.

Thankfully here in the Bay, the number of cases is running at less than a third of the national average at six cases per 100,000 people, compared to 18 per 100,000 for England as whole, but we must remain vigilant to ensure it stays that way.

As with all these things in an ever changing landscape, the rules, whilst simple in theory – hands, face and space, trips off the tongue, but interpreting those rules is fraught with difficulty, and as the saying goes, the devil is in the detail.

For many of the people that we have been in touch with, the advice has to be to remain cautious at all times and follow the rule of six regardless of the setting be that in exercise classes, out and about or in your own home.

For our own part, we have endeavoured to keep ahead of the curve, to allow us to answer pressing questions from those most at risk during this crisis and it is clear that some people who were beginning to venture out have gone back behind closed doors.

Shielded people who at last felt able to begin socialising and visiting others have taken their own counsel and have chosen to remain at a distance and it is those

people that we continue to help through the Torbay Community Helpline.

Just short of 4000 people have now contacted us on 01803 446022 – some to volunteer to help others, some to ask for help with lots of things from shopping to prescriptions, and we expect those calls to continue and, in the light of the latest guidance, to increase.

We have had to roll back tentative plans to have more people socialising face to face, whether that be indoors or outdoors and we are mindful that whatever we do organise have to be in groups of no more than six.

That will mean that there is once again an increased risk of some people, particularly the vulnerable, who do not have their own support network of family and friends becoming more isolated.

Mental health and wellbeing at this time is as important now as it ever was and everyone is encouraged to think through how the continuing changes might impact on your day to day life.

Contact with other people remains very important and maintaining relationships with people you trust is important for your mental wellbeing. If you can't meet in person, think about how you can stay in touch with friends and family via telephone, video calls or social media instead – whether it's people you normally see often or connecting with old friends.

Our volunteers continue to befriend those who are lonely and the Torbay Community Helpline remains available for anyone who needs it and its work has been recognised with a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to sustain it and to develop it going forward.

All our partners – Brixham Does Care, Age UK Torbay, Healthwatch Torbay, Citizen's Advice Torbay and many others remain on board to help combat loneliness, ensure no-one goes without food or medicines and offering help with mental health issues.

We are in it for the long haul and are prepared to meet whatever this virus throws at us. Make a note of the number – 01803 446022, you never know when you might need it.

But it is also important that we all continue to look out for each other be that neighbours, friends or relatives. We have come this far and the community in the Bay is stronger for it.

Thankful

# Opportunity to step back and observe

23 September 2020

David Gledhill

## **IT IS HARD to think of the pandemic providing opportunities, but that is exactly what happened for key organisations across the Bay.**

If nothing else, the lockdown gave people the opportunity to step back and to observe the effects of life slowing down – on individuals, on organisations, on companies and on the environment.

It also offered organisations and charities across the Bay an unprecedented opportunity to work together for the greater good and important lessons were learned.

Work is now continuing to ensure that those lessons are not lost as life returns to a new normal and relationships that have been forged through the crisis are taken forward.

Torbay Council has been quick to recognise the collective strength of working together, and they will be exploring it further at their second annual community conference at the end of the month.

It has been documented at length in this column how charities across the Bay came together to staff the Torbay Community Coronavirus Helpline, which launched a full week before lockdown started with a 12 hours a day, seven days a week service.

The Helpline was initially launched by Torbay Community Development Trust, Healthwatch Torbay, Age UK Torbay, Citizen's Advice Torbay and Brixham Does Care though many other organisation have since joined to swell the ranks, providing staff, volunteers and expertise as the need has expanded.

It is still running on 01803 446022 and is evolving into a one stop call service that will allow people to reach out to one number to get answers to questions about services, whether it be in the health, public services or charitable sector – one call, that's all.

To date, the helpline has taken more than 12500 calls and has reached out to 4000 people who have either needed help or have been offering help during the coronavirus crisis.

Torbay Council has seen the benefit and the flexibility of working with smaller, sometimes more agile groups who were able to adapt quickly to meet a changing landscape without having to follow sometimes arduous due processes.

The Torbay Food Alliance was another excellent example of smaller groups working together alongside the council, Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust and Torbay Community Development Trust to ensure that no one in the Bay went hungry as jobs were lost and some people were no longer able to provide for themselves.

Twelve different foodbanks joined forces to provide nearly a quarter of a million meals and it continues to help around 400 people a week, no mean feat when large quantities of food were hard to come by.

The Food Alliance now represents ten food banks as two of the organisations that were providing the service have returned to providing their more traditional community led services, but all are braced in case there is another surge in demand caused by the end of both furlough and the traditional tourist season.

Boundaries between all the sectors were blurred, but necessity meant that no one batted an eyelid and new cross sector relationships were forged, which will now be built upon for the good of everyone in the Bay. It would be easy to fall back to where we were, each in our own bunker fighting our own corner and battling against each other for elusive and restricted funding, but that would be a step backwards and a failure to learn the lessons that have been presented.

During what was hopefully the worst of the pandemic, we all worked together to relieve pressure on the NHS's emergency services, which was incredibly successful.

But it went further and it meant that vulnerable people across the Bay were looked after ensuring that no one was alone, no one went hungry and essential back up was provided where necessary.

No one agency can claim all the plaudits, because none worked in isolation; on the contrary, they worked together, often alongside volunteers, and the beneficiaries were the residents of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham.

Torbay Council leader Steve Darling summed it up when talking about the upcoming Zoom conference: "It's important that we reach across our community and, using the opportunities from the new ways of working which have emerged during the pandemic, engage with people in a different way."

To book your space on the Torbay Community Virtual Conference on Wednesday September 30th from 5-7pm go to: <https://bit.ly/33Sclbg>

learning

# There is something about a crisis 7 October 2020

David Gledhill

**THERE is something about a crisis that brings out the very best in people helping them find creative solutions to problems – the bigger the problem, the better the solution.**

Over the last few months organisations, and charities across the Bay have had to look long and hard at the way they do things and have had to change the way they work as a result.

They have had to rewrite the rule book as the fight against COVID-19 became a daily reality changing lives beyond recognition for the majority of residents of the Bay.

Fortunately, there were people in place who were prepared to do just that and they come together in an unprecedented way to ensure that no one went hungry, no one was left isolated and everyone got the help and support that they needed.

Prior to this crisis, the very idea that some charities would work together was at times an anathema, particularly when they were forced to compete for the same pot of funds, but when COVID struck in March, they ignored that and pitched in together.

The need to work collaboratively between paid officers of statutory authorities like the council and the NHS and charity workers and volunteers was also recognised as everyone worked for the benefit of the community as a whole.

We rewrote the book. We put everything behind us and we started again and the results have been overwhelmingly fabulous, so much so that we now know that we cannot go back to the way we were before.

No way.

We are stronger together and there is a new found respect between groups of people that have never seen the need to work alongside each other before and while the future looks tough, the response being lined up also looks formidable.

COVID has not beaten us; on the contrary, it has made us stronger and has made us look to each other for answers at a time when some issues were threatening to divide us.

Last week more than 120 people joined a Zoom call organised by Torbay Council, which sought to cement the

ties that been made at every level in what we have long recognised as incredibly resilient communities across the Bay.

We always hoped it would be the case, but now we know that when the going gets tough, there is an amazing network of people ready to get going and do whatever it takes.

Politics didn't come into it when the crisis hit, and neither should they going forward; what is important are the residents of Torbay, and they need to be kept at the top of the agenda – just as they were when COVID-19 first struck back in March.

No one held back when the plea went out to find staff for the helpline – organisations stepped up, councils stepped up, the NHS stepped up and individuals stepped up to volunteer.

We knew what needed to be done and we did it! No mean feat in a society normally split by politics, riven by the arguments around Brexit and delineated by wealth and poverty.

None of that mattered and neither should it be allowed to dominate as we look to the future and work out what we need to do to rebuild the Bay for the good of all regardless of age, wealth or social standing.

The council's two hour Zoom call was a celebration of partnership and collaboration. It sought out the finest that the Bay has to offer and explored how we can deliver the very best version of Torbay for everyone.

We know that our communities can step up when challenged as they have done during the crisis, but we also know that, regardless of COVID's next twists and turns, damage has already been done and we need to work together to tackle that.

That is where you come in – all of you, your friends, colleagues, neighbours and acquaintances – everyone, because at the end of the day, communities need to look after themselves.

We are in this for the long haul and there is a great deal of work to do and to do that we need to work together and to trust each other to do what is right for everyone.

The first big steps were taken during the crisis, now we need to build on those new relationships for the benefit of us all, or as 19th century activist, Helen Keller said "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

solutions

# We must all remain vigilant

14 October 2020

David Gledhill

**THE DAYS are drawing in, and the temperature is falling, which this year can only mean one thing – the risk of further fresh outbreaks of COVID-19, and we must all remain vigilant.**

At the risk of tempting fate, we have been relatively lucky here in our little bit of Devon, despite it also being the place where some of the earliest UK cases were recorded at the beginning of March.

But that should not make us complacent because case numbers are rising again just like they are in the rest of the country.

As we have seen in recent weeks, large swathes of the country are facing fresh restrictions where the rule of six no longer applies and people are not allowed to meet in each other's homes and gardens.

We can only hope that everyone in the Bay plays their part in preventing similar measures being needed here and that it is down to each and every one of us.

We have become accustomed to keeping our distance – two metres where possible, one metre where not – and physical contact with anyone other than our partners and families living under the same roof is but a distant memory.

Masks have become the order of the day in shops and more recently in pubs and restaurants when not eating or drinking and life has found a new rhythm, for now.

None of us knows what the future will bring, but we do know that there are many vulnerable people here in the Bay who are relying on the rest of us to act responsibly to prevent them coming to harm.

Some, despite guidance from the Government, have chosen not to come out of isolation, opting instead to remain shielded in their homes and they still need us now and will continue to do so until a vaccine can be developed.

Of course, the conspiracy theorists are endeavouring to drive a wedge deep into our communities and we must be careful to follow only reliable factual advice whenever we can, especially when we are out and about.

Guidance is confusing, it can be contradictory and it can be frustrating, but it is the best we have and to rely on anything else is at best foolish and at worst dangerous, not just to ourselves, but to others.

Here at the Torbay Community Development Trust we are working with our partners across charities, voluntary organisations, Torbay Council and the Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust to prepare for a second spike – plans that we hope we will never need.

The focus of those plans will remain the Torbay Community Helpline on 01803 446022 which has been a lifeline for thousands of people since this crisis began back in March and it will continue to be staffed from 10am to 6pm, Monday to Friday and from 9.30am to 12.30pm.

Dr Caroline Dimond, Torbay's Director of Public Health has warned that we are already seeing fresh cases across the board - in our schools, care homes and in the hospitality sector. Furthermore, all age groups have been affected.

Now is not the time to relax; on the contrary, now is the time to become ever more vigilant as the potential for massively increased pressure on our local health services when a coronavirus outbreak is combined with seasonal flu.

Thus far, communities across the Bay have pulled together to fight the virus and to fight the potential for virus, with friends looking out for friends, and neighbours supporting each other.

Volunteers have stepped up in ways never seen before and between us we have ensured that no one in the Bay has gone hungry and no one in the Bay has been left lonely and isolated.

It has been a long year already and with no end in sight some people are despairing that we will ever see the back of COVID-19 and are as a result becoming less stringent in their own precautions, which puts us all at risk.

You can choose to believe who you like when it comes to the facts about the best ways of combatting this virus, but you do not have the right to impose your beliefs on others, with potentially devastating effects.

Your carelessness, your lack of diligence could mean a life-threatening if not deadly illness for someone you will never know that you once met, no matter how briefly – here in the Bay the relatives and friends of 58 people who are no longer with us, can attest to that.

guidance

# What could possibly go wrong?

21 October 2020

David Gledhill

## **NEARLY a year ago, our volunteer Ageing Well Torbay Festival organisers started work on the annual celebration of ageing.**

When they first met in November, they were still reeling from a fabulously successful festival held a month earlier at the Riviera Centre in Torquay.

A day packed full of events – entertainments, crafts, dance, informative talks, lots of music, sports to try, yoga and tai chi sessions to join in, hobbies to take up, a fashion catwalk and dozens of information stalls – had attracted a record crowd of around 1750 people from across the Bay.

Feedback was fantastic and fulsome with one attendee remarking as she left, “Just like Christmas Day. Wonderful.”

And so at that first meeting when the subject of where to hold the Festival in 2020 came up, it was a no-brainer – we had learned a lot of lessons and were ready to build on our success with another bigger and better celebration once again at the Riviera Centre.

The committee set about bringing together a mix of new talent to appear alongside the popular speakers, musicians and acts from the previous five years of festivals and they were excited by what they had in store.

The Riviera Centre was booked again for Saturday, October 24th and planning began in earnest. Acts were confirmed, a programme started to take shape and groups and organisations across the Bay were queuing up to take a stall in the ever popular information hall.

What could possibly go wrong?

When COVID came to the Bay back in March no one could foresee the effect on public gatherings some seven months later, but as the weeks and months passed it became obvious that there was no prospect of bringing together people in large numbers.

Unless..

We knew we could not bring just short of 2000 people together under one roof, but what if we brought them together virtually whilst they all stayed under their own roofs wherever they were in the Bay?

The meeting where it was decided was a virtual one via Zoom, and so it seemed only a small step to go from that to putting a whole festival on-line. We had the websites and we were sure we could acquire the required

technology and what if we involved our local community radio station, Riviera FM 107.9 as well?

No sooner were the words uttered than the plans were made and all our energy was put into doing something that none of us had ever done before – a festival online, a festival reflected in the name @Home.

Since then, the committee have done what they always do best – organise, persuade, cajole and ultimately convince others that the idea of performing to an empty auditorium from the stage in the Palace Theatre in

Paignton was a good one.

We quickly learned, by dint of numerous errors, the best ways to capture performances both on video and in audio and how to all but iron out those errors using some clever bits of editing software.

The result? Most of what we would normally bring you in an Ageing Well Torbay Festival - crafts, dance, informative talks, lots of music, sports to try, yoga and tai chi sessions to join in, hobbies to take up. The only thing we have struggled with are the information stalls and social distancing meant that we couldn't deliver a catwalk

But overall, we are incredibly proud of what we have achieved from a standing start and we have learned a lot in the process, an awful lot, which gives lie to the myth you can't teach an old....

So please join us this Saturday (October 24th) online at [www.ageingwelltorbay.com](http://www.ageingwelltorbay.com) from 10 am until 3 pm for a visual feast or, if you would prefer, from 11am to 3pm on Riviera FM on 107.9 for an audio experience to savour.

We have just about everything we would usually have in a festival and as always it is a celebration, not just of ageing, but of the very best talent that over 50's in the Bay have to offer.

It is not all perfect, but it is all delivered with the very best of intention, enthusiasm and a genuine desire to keep us all together at this difficult time.

We were determined that COVID would not beat us and we want you to share that determination with us from 10am on Saturday. See you there.

Proud

# The clocks have gone back 28 October 2020

David Gledhill

**AND SO it begins – the clocks have gone back, the nights are drawing in to the point where evenings are immersed in darkness, and Christmas is just around the corner.**

But what sort of Christmas are we looking forward to this year? I am not sure any of us know the answer to that other than the fact it will be different to any we have had before.

At one end of the scale, supermarkets are gearing up to produce smaller turkeys, smaller packs of Christmas crackers and more Christmas puddings for two rather than family portions.

At the other end of the same scale, the foodbanks are gearing up for their busiest Christmas ever as the side effects of the virus affect more people, pushing them further into poverty or making others feel pinch for the first time.

That is the thing about COVID 19; it does not discriminate - it will confidently strike whoever you are - and the effects are the same regardless of your wealth and social standing.

Now, as ever at this time of year, is a good time to start planning for the Festive season, but this year we all need to take stock and plan not just for ourselves, but for others – for our family, friends, and potentially for our neighbours.

Lockdown and the three tier system will inevitably mean that some families used to coming together over the festive season will be prevented from doing so, which for some will mean a Christmas alone.

During the first lockdown, we launched a Good Neighbour scheme that helped communities across the Bay support each other and the relationships and networks that were set up continue to this day.

But as the days grow darker and colder, we hope to see more neighbours looking out for each other in ways that have never been more needed. Now and in the build-up to what for some may be a miserable Christmas.

All it takes is a phone call or a quickly scribbled note pushed through a letterbox, and that can make all the difference to those who think they are going into winter alone, estranged from their families by a virus over which they have no control.

During the crisis, we heard about neighbours going the extra mile – not just checking in on people or doing their shopping or collecting their prescriptions, but organising outdoor socially distanced socials,

It might be dark and it might be cold, but there is nothing to stop us doing the same over the coming months – we just need to wrap up warmer. It is amazing how much a mulled wine or cider can make to an outdoor gathering which is properly organised and COVID aware.

You might want to get a few socially distanced neighbours (in groups of no more than six) to celebrate Halloween later this week or Bonfire Night the week after, or leave it a little later and celebrate Christmas and New Year with them.

We know of neighbours organising coffee mornings over the fence and others linking together for weekly outdoor exercise sessions. Where there is a will, there is a way as long as you are sensible about it.

Before all our lives changed back in March, people were concerned in our over- bureaucratized society that we needed permission to look out for each other – we don't, but if you are worried about it our Community Builders are on hand to help.

We have a pack that we can send to you with a few suggestions about how to get going – perhaps setting up a telephone tree or a Whats App group – or even just knocking on doors and then stepping back when it is answered.

Some people react badly to winter every year because the cold and dark keeps them indoors for longer, and they miss the company of others. And that is without a virus.

For most Christmas is that breakpoint when friends, neighbours, family and far-flung relatives come together to eat drink and be merry. We can still do some of that this year, though the friends may be closer than you think in the shape of your neighbours

As we have proved over the last seven months, there is plenty of goodwill to go around. Let's keep it going.

To find out more or to sign up for our Good Neighbours scheme contact the Torbay Community Helpline on 01803 446022.



appreciation

# Some might say it was inevitable

4 November 2020

David Gledhill

## **SOME might say it was inevitable, but as of tomorrow we all face further restrictions because of the rising number of cases of COVID-19**

Over the last few weeks, the number of cases in Torbay has risen steadily, and sadly there have been more deaths at Torbay Hospital, but we remained Tier One until much tougher rules were introduced right across the country, which become law tomorrow.

We must all remain vigilant and whether locked down or not, we all need to pay attention to the main precautionary message of hands, face and space, which thankfully, most people in this area were already adhering to.

Voluntary and charitable organisations have continued to work alongside the statutory authorities such as the Torbay and South Devon NHS and Torbay Council to ensure all that can be done in this fight is being done

It remains essential that we ease the pressure on Torbay Hospital, particularly at this time of year when they always become busier with a variety of winter-related ills, other than coronavirus.

The Helpline, which became a primary focus during lockdown, continues to work with the most vulnerable in the Bay and is again stepping up capacity to meet the needs of those who need a little bit of extra help as the lockdown again takes effect.

Since it launched back in March, the Helpline, which was originally set up by Torbay Community Development Trust, Healthwatch Torbay, Age UK Torbay, Brixham Does Care and Citizens Advice Torbay, has taken somewhere in the region of 15000 calls.

Staffed with the help of volunteers, more than 4000 people have been in touch – some to ask for help, others to offer their services, ensuring that no one in the Bay goes hungry or becomes isolated.

So successful has the Helpline been that it is now funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and The Office for Civil Society (part of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport) with a grant of just short of £100,000 to keep it going for the next six months.

As it evolves to become a one-stop-shop for services in the Bay, the original partners have been joined by volunteers and expertise from a variety of other organisations, including Torbay Council, Yes Brixham,

Libraries Unlimited, What's Your Problem CIC, the Torbay Advice Network, Disability Support Torbay, Homemaker Southwest and the Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust.

As a result, the Helpline is providing triage services to support people who need help with their finances; it is the referral service for the foodbanks, and increasingly provides help for those struggling with their mental health.

In short, if you have an issue and do not know where to go, then the best place to start is a call to the Helpline on 01803 446022, and if we don't know the answer, then we will find it for you.

The Helpline is operating from 10am to 6pm from Monday through to Friday and from 9.30pm through to 12.30pm. If you need help, please ring it and if you can offer help, get in touch. We need you.

Even though we remain on alert against the virus, thus far, people in Brixham, Torquay and Paignton have managed to ride out the worst of it, in no small part because of the way everyone pulled together in a time of crisis

But the calls are still coming in, and there are people that are still suffering the effects of COVID, directly through illness or bereavement or indirectly through a catastrophic change in their circumstances.

Every week we find new people who have turned to the Helpline for the first time - and the longer this crisis continues, the more complex the calls become. We are expecting many more after tomorrow.

So if you can help – perhaps as a befriender for someone lonely, as a rapid responder picking up food or meds, setting up a Good Neighbour scheme or even answering calls on the Helpline itself do get in touch.

We have adopted a battle cry for the Helpline, which is One Call – That's All and we aim to live up to that no matter what is thrown at us here in the Bay.

One thing is for certain – we've got your back and we know that if we ask for your help, then you will be there for each other.

Ring to register as a volunteer today – 01803 446022.

evolve

# Torbay coming together in times of need

11 November 2020

*Simon Sherbersky*

**THE LAST SIX months has seen a coming together on a level I have never experienced in 18 years of working in Torbay. I wanted to take this opportunity to celebrate the different elements of this.**

I wanted to take this opportunity to celebrate the different elements of this. First, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit us, we saw huge numbers of people offering to help their neighbours with the 1st lockdown.

More than 900 people responded to Cllr Jack Dart's Help Hub Facebook page. We worked together with Jack and all those people were passed over to us on the community helpline. We referenced them all and matched people needing help with the closest person offering – a huge thank you to all those people who have helped and continue to do so! Jack also set up a website, so people could access information to help them and again we collaborated and put info on that website rather than setting up or using another one.

The community helpline was started by us here at TCDT, but soon after lots of others joined it and we built a whole range of supports to ensure people in need had what they needed, whether that was food parcels, emotional support, financial advice or pretty much anything people called up asking for, as long as it was possible.

Again, a huge thank you to all the voluntary organisations, who are too many to mention, who have contributed to this and offered to much.

But it didn't stop there, Children's Services at Torbay Council were planning to set up an early help phoneline, but when they saw ours, they asked if they could join in and that is what happened, with Children's Services providing staff to help take the calls. But it was not just them, our NHS Hospital trust also fielded people to help with the calls and the health system provided some resources to enable us to expand the supports too!

One of the biggest demands was in relation to food – remember what it was like in April, limited food on the supermarket shelves, massive queues at pharmacies and food retailers, but more importantly a quadrupling of demand for food banks and cooked meals and with support from us and the NHS the Foodbank Alliance brought together 12 existing organisations into collaboration.

But the problem was supply; none of the existing supply chains could supply the level of items needed. So we reached out to local businesses and Richardson Hotels came up trumps and provided the supply we needed so that people could get the essential food supplies they needed. This was further supported by a range of residents and businesses pledging funds to help buy the food through a Crowdfunder campaign.

So now we have residents, voluntary and community groups, public agencies and local businesses all working together to support us all through the challenges of a pandemic!

Long may it continue and, to date, it has with unprecedented collaboration across a whole range of individuals, groups and organisations, which has enabled us to secure additional funding to maintain it all.

Special thanks to the National Lottery Community Fund, Torbay Council, Devon Clinical Commissioning Group, police and Crime Commissioner and Devon Community Foundation, amongst others, for resourcing all of this fantastic collaboration. It has been an absolute pleasure to be part of this coming together on a scale we only dreamed of before.

Special  
Thanks

# Some people are finding it tough going

18 November 2020

David Gledhill

## **TWO weeks into the second lockdown of this coronavirus crisis and some people are finding it tough going.**

We went into the lockdown better prepared in all sorts of ways – we all learned a lot during the first lockdown and organisations, working together, had planned for it, just in case.

The Helpline is staffed by experienced and knowledgeable volunteers, having helped more than 4250 through this crisis and it is now networked with other groups and statutory bodies, who were poised to help where they could.

But no amount of preparation could galvanise people mentally for a second round of isolation - being kept apart from the very friends and relatives they were finally being allowed to meet again.

It has not been helped by a severe second spike of cases in the Bay – in some areas involving many more people than first time around - forcing hundreds into self-isolation within days of the lockdown.

Brixham is said to be a hotspot, as are some districts of Paignton, but wherever we live, the focus remains on us to stop it spreading further.

We can blame the prime minister, Boris Johnson, we can blame the health secretary, Matt Hancock, but it is not about politics, and it is not about politicians.

Locally we can blame the police for spoiling our fun or the council's director of public health, Caroline Dimond, for repeatedly emphasising what we all need to do – hands, face, space.

We can blame tourists for bringing it in (not so), or we can blame the science, choosing a conspiracy theory instead. But in reality, there is only one thing to blame in this crisis – and that is the virus itself.

The fact is we are the ones that are spreading it, and for that, we must take full responsibility and ensure that, whether in lockdown or not, we are not tempted to relax the rules or become complacent.

It isn't easy, and it is frustrating, and when track and trace glows red on your phone, it is tempting to ignore it, as so many must have considered doing in the last few weeks, before taking full responsibility, not just for their own health, but the health of others.

None of us think that it could possibly happen to us, particularly if we think we have been careful, but evidence across the country shows that is simply not true. How many of the 70 plus people who have died in Torbay thought it couldn't happen to them? It did.

From a purely personal point of view, I too felt that my cautious mask and glove-wearing approach to everything would get me through the worst of it, ensuring my vulnerable, shielding wife would be ok too.

But a quick drink the evening before lockdown at my local rugby club put paid to that. The track and trace message came through two days later, and my first reaction cannot be repeated in a family newspaper.

I raged against the club (unreasonable as they went above and beyond in making the premises covid secure) and against the young fans who were there to watch

Manchester United on the big screens (and did not act responsibly). I berated myself for risking a drink before lockdown 2 and finally came to the sensible option of blaming the virus that has done so much damage to so many lives.

However, as the realisation sunk in, I knew we had to do everything we could to minimise the risks and we divided up the house accordingly – me downstairs and my wife upstairs with cross over points, like the kitchen, disinfected after every use.

Our good neighbours were on hand to do the shopping, help walk the dogs and ring occasionally to check all was OK and I can't begin to begin to say how much that meant when the potential was to be cut off from everyone for the duration.

It has not been easy (and not helped by having a socially isolated birthday part way through) but to do anything other than total isolation would have been irresponsible and dangerous not just for my wife, but for everyone.

I have been lucky, it has only been two weeks of isolation with no illness, and I have a fabulous support network but if you or someone you know isn't so fortunate do ring the Helpline on 01803 446022 because we are there for them.

# Hopes pinned on a new vaccine

25 November 2020

David Gledhill

## **AT LAST some seemingly good news about the coronavirus pandemic, with hopes being pinned on a vaccine being available within months.**

It can't come too soon for most of us who have been in and out of lockdown for the last eight months, but it won't be in time for Christmas and that is depressing news for many.

No one can say for sure, but no matter what the Government says, for most of us, Christmas will be a muted affair with limited numbers around the traditional dinner table and even fewer playing festive games.

None of us has a crystal ball, but unless the figures here in the Bay start to go down quickly, then we may well be faced with further restrictions after the second lockdown is lifted elsewhere.

Across the Bay, the figures have been rising in the last few weeks at much faster rates than were witnessed during the first lockdown. In some communities, the incidence of illness is now so high that almost everyone knows someone who is affected.

In Brixham, where the statistics rocketed to astronomical levels, making it one of the worst hotspots in the whole of the south-west, friends and neighbours have been swapping horrific tales about those suffering the brunt of it.

Suddenly across the Bay, it is no longer a virus that affects others, it is affecting us and the consequences of our own actions are plain to see – it isn't just the infection statistics that are rising – so are the numbers of people in hospital.

Thankfully the majority survive, but that is not true of everyone and inevitably the other statistic that is on the increase is the one concerning the number of deaths.

Nowadays, most of us know someone who either has Covid or has had it, and it is difficult to share a conversation without the subject coming up and without another sad story being shared.

Like a group of friends in the Bay who decided to ignore the guidance and six of them got together for a social gathering not knowing that one of them was carrying the virus, or so the story goes.

They took it home with them to their spouses and as a result, three were ill enough to be hospitalised and one tragically died. The harshest lesson of them all, but one that shows only too clearly that none of us is immune and that you can't always spot the carrier.

During the first lockdown, the majority of people followed the guidance to the letter, but this time around there appears to be confusion about exactly what is allowed and who is allowed to do it.

Some people are still attending workplaces, and students are still going to school and social media has been alive with misleading facts and bold assertions based on myths.

In some areas, people have been quick to blame tourists, although there is no evidence to support it. Others are blaming young people for bringing it home from school, but again there is no evidence.

The real evidence points at people becoming careless and breaking the relatively simple rules of keeping your distance, not mixing in each other's homes, wearing masks and hand sanitising.

The message this time is straightforward, but it needs to be followed at all times – hands, face and space. Wash your hands, cover your face and make sure you have space wherever you are.

We are all in this together and our actions can have dire consequences, and the worst thing is that we might never know the people who suffer those consequences.

We need to look out for each other, we need to continue to support our neighbours and we need to make sure that our community is doing all it can for the most vulnerable within it.

Calls to the Torbay Community Helpline continue to come in at a rate of up to 55 a day and, so far, we have been in touch with more than 4,500 people.

As we build towards an uncertain Christmas, we will continue to be there for everyone, whether we are ensuring no one goes hungry or making sure that no one is left lonely and isolated.

Christmas this year may well turn out to be a memorable one, but let's try very hard to make sure that no matter what restrictions are in place, we all make it memorable for the right reasons – because we all looked out for each other and helped beat this dreadful virus.

good news

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# ANOTHER week and another set of rules to live by 2 December 2020

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David Gledhill

## **ANOTHER week and another set of rules to live by in the battle against COVID-19.**

It is now an incredible 37 weeks since we first put up the shutters and entered our first lockdown on March 16th and it feels like the rules have changed every few weeks since.

Thankfully in Torbay, we now seem to be winning the fight again after a disastrous run of results that showed that some areas of the Bay coronavirus cases were among the highest in the South West.

But as we come out of Lockdown 2 our figures are around two-thirds of the national average, but our new classification as Tier Two gives no cause for complacency and to keep the figures down in the run-up to Christmas, we all need to be careful.

Too many people have now been affected directly by this dreadful virus, and even if they have not contracted it themselves, nearly everyone in the Bay now knows someone who has had it.

Mercifully most who have contracted the virus do survive, but that cannot be said of all and just short of 90 people will not be seeing in the New Year. Whatever we choose to do over the next few weeks, we need to remember that.

The effects of this pandemic are also showing themselves in other ways with huge swathes of the economy, and by default, the people who work in it, suffering badly.

Several reports have been published that show only too clearly that it is the poorest, the most vulnerable and the oldest who are taking the brunt.

Ageing Well Torbay has been working with people over the age of 50 for more than five years and we know only too well the devastating effects that loneliness and isolation can have on individuals in our community.

Having worked hard to overcome that, we are again seeing the effects in people that are self isolating, either through choice or through necessity brought on by an existing health condition.

Nationally we are being warned that already life expectancy is falling and the number of years that we will live without a disability is going backwards – and that was before the virus wreaked havoc.

We are also seeing that inequalities in health and wellbeing are widening as a result of coronavirus, a fact that is not going to be helped by the number of over 50's becoming unemployed since March, doubling.

That means as if we did not have enough problems with poverty in Torbay before all this, that people struggling to find work as they approach retirement is going to lead to the very real prospect of pensioner poverty.

The effects, unchecked and unchallenged, could be dreadful for us all as we know that people on low incomes are likely to end up living with three or more long term health conditions.

Or, put another way, the poorest people will die younger and will suffer poor health for longer.

We already know that around 50% of the population in the Bay are over the age of 50 – which is way above the national average and presents us with some tough challenges.

But we also know that stronger communities, as have been demonstrated since this pandemic arrived in our towns, can help people who are struggling.

The hundreds of volunteers that came forward during the first lockdown showed the strength of our communities and the 60 or so good neighbour schemes that have been set up since then are continuing to make sure that we all look out for each other at a very local level.

Strong communities have never been more needed because even as restrictions are eased, we need to continue to be vigilant – vigilant for ourselves, vigilant for our friends and vigilant for our neighbours.

We got our figures down by acting collectively and if we are to keep them down then we must remain aware of the effects our actions could have on a large part of the Bay's population.

The rules will change again, and we need to make sure we are listening to the right people and for that you could do no better than find one of the Torbay Council COVID Community Champions – if you want to know more and sign up at [www.torbay.gov.uk/covid-champions](http://www.torbay.gov.uk/covid-champions).

You can also make sure you have the right information.

For all volunteering opportunities, the Torbay Community Helpline on 10803 446022.

change

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# Just over two weeks to go to the big day 9 December 2020

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David Gledhill

## **JUST over two weeks to go to the big day and feelings are mixed.**

Hopefully, most people are looking forward to a Christmas with family and friends, but sadly that does not apply to everyone and for many, the outlook is bleak.

Coronavirus has shown only too clearly the huge divide between those that have a good support network – be that family, friends, neighbours or others in their community and those that are alone.

Over the last nine months, people have gone the extra mile to make sure that no one goes hungry and no one is left isolated as we have all united for one common cause – fighting COVID -19.

From the very beginning, way back in March, communities in Torquay, Brixham and Paignton came together in ways not seen before, to look out for each other and that spirit of oneness is thankfully still with us.

Time and again, as rules have been changed - relaxed and tightened – the people of Torbay have done what they do best, and that is to make sure we are all in this together, fighting the same fight and fighting for those who need it most.

When the figures went through the roof a few weeks ago, people realised that things were going to have to change, and within just a few weeks, the numbers were tamed and we are again back on track.

Now, just over a week into Tier 2 restrictions, we do not know what the future holds, not even what the next week will bring, but whatever it is, we will hunker down and deal with it in any way that we can.

These final days in the build-up to Christmas are so important in so many ways – we have to keep the number of cases in check to allow us to celebrate with families on the day.

But we also need the chance to let our hair down a little after what has been for so many a truly dreadful year – taking its toll on a personal as well as economic level.

We also need the chance to get out onto the high street in a sensible, masked and socially distanced way to support our local businesses to help ensure they will still be with us at the end of all this.

Sadly, we will not be getting out to office parties or other traditional festive events this year, but there is plenty going on in different ways - ways that 12 months ago would have seemed incomprehensible.

We have worked with the Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust to pull together a guide to online events and activities this December, which can be found at: [www.ageingwelltorbay.com](http://www.ageingwelltorbay.com)

It is an opportunity to connect with your community virtually. Just because we can't be together doesn't mean we can't celebrate. Take a look at the guide to some of the local and national activities available, to get you in the festive spirit or support your wellbeing.

There is a bit of everything – just presented in a different way this year - including carolling you can listen to online, or take part in with your neighbours from your own doorstep and online church services courtesy of Riviera Life Church.

There are also cooking and craft workshops, musical and panto performances, and of course, the Torbay Christmas Trail – which now has more than 3,000 people sharing their Christmas lighting interests over on Facebook.

Christmas is not going to be easy and as good news as the impending vaccine is, it will not come in time for most of us to make a difference this Christmas and New Year.

So please, keep on doing what you have been doing all year, watching out for each other, checking in with neighbours and making lots of zoom and traditional telephone calls.

Do call on a neighbour, just to check. Too many people will not be spending their Christmas in the bosom of their families and more people than ever before are facing the festive season alone for the very first time.

If you need help or want to offer help then the Torbay

Community Helpline will be available but the hours will be a little different for the weeks commencing December 21st and December 28th - from 10am to 2pm from Monday to Thursday only - on 01803 446022.

sensible

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# As we approach Christmas 16 December 2020

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David Gledhill

## **AS ALWAYS at this time of year as we approach Christmas, we begin to look back to check that our goals have been achieved.**

But this year, that would be a futile exercise as all our plans and aspirations, prepared last December, were thrown into disarray just three months later.

Last December, in this column, we were looking forward to the final 15 months of the six-year Ageing Well Torbay programme, which has seen a steady reduction in the number of over 50-year-olds who are lonely or isolated.

2020 was to be a year of consolidation where we built on our successes and put everything in place to ensure the work that we had helped start would continue without us.

We wanted to be certain that the lessons we had learned were shared so that others could replicate the successes and avoid repeating our failures that were inevitable using our test and learn techniques.

We wanted to leave a legacy for others to pick up and take forward, not just here in Torbay but across the country, as we all face the very real prospect of an ageing population where those over the age of 50 will outnumber those under the age of 50.

And we still want to do all of that, but we are currently running nearly 12 months behind in achieving it and the landscape in which we work has changed more than any of us could possibly have imagined.

It is easy to dwell on the negatives; we all know that parts of our economy have been brought to its knees, individuals lives have been changed beyond recognition and the effects of isolation on some has been devastating.

But there have also been some incredible positives. Back in February, this column was bemoaning the seeming decline of volunteering, which as a concept appeared to have lost its shine.

How wrong we were. Within just a few weeks of that column appearing on February 28th, we were being inundated with people coming forward to offer their services on behalf of their communities.

These were indeed unprecedented times that required innovative solutions, and communities across the Bay rose to the challenge. Cometh the hour, cometh the volunteers.

The hashtag #TorbayKind rapidly became a part of our lexicon as stories were shared and celebrated, and human kindness's spirit flourished at every level – in neighbourhoods, streets and across communities.

Our regular work supporting the more vulnerable members of our society has also had to change to meet the challenge and much of it has had to be put on hold as we strove to find new ways of helping each other.

But for all that, and despite everything, our communities are stronger now than they were a year ago and new relationships have been forged where non existed before.

Like everyone else, we hope that next year we will be able to return to the work we all love, and thankfully the National Lottery have agreed to fund us for another year to allow us to tie up the loose ends.

Hopefully, we will be able to reinstate all those coffee mornings and socials that run every day in different parts of the Bay and we will be able to progress our work to achieve the World Health Organisation's Age-Friendly recognition for Torbay.

Our Torbay Over 50's Assembly has been ticking along quietly in the background and is now poised to join others of every age group to start the rebuild and support those who need our help most,

We have proved that we can help each other and we have proved that when things get really tough our strong communities come into their own. That is something we need to keep sight of as we move into 2021.

For all that we have endured in 2020, we have also got lots to celebrate and lots of people to be thankful for – the many volunteers, the staff of charities and voluntary organisations, all of whom have worked tirelessly alongside Torbay Council and the Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust.

Between us, we have made sure that wherever possible no one has gone hungry and no has been left lonely. Not on our watch.

The Helpline on 01803 446022, will be operating reduced hours over Christmas and New Year, from Monday to Thursday from 10 am to 2pm for two weeks from Monday, December 21st.

# consolidation

# At the core of everything we do are wonderful people 23 December 2020

David Gledhill

**AT THE CORE of everything we do are people – wonderful people and whilst everything else has been different this year, people have remained our priority.**

We might not have met as many face to face, but we have linked up with more people and put more people together in the last ten months than ever before.

In all our projects – be that Ageing Well Torbay, Positive People, SENDIASS, OurBus, Torbay Together Imagine This... or the Torbay Volunteer Centre – people are the glue that holds it all together.

Nevermore so than this year when our routines have been disrupted, our lives turned on their heads. People whether individuals, groups or organisations have shone through.

Time and again, we have seen people go the extra mile for each other at a time when kindness and support has never been more needed.

Communities across the Bay have proved to be strong, and they have also shown to be resilient in the face of anything that can be thrown at them – even a global pandemic.

Some of the team have struggled because our work puts people at the core of everything we do. Like everyone else we have had to adjust – find new ways of communicating, new ways of enabling and new ways of supporting others to help each other.

The Helpline has been there for most of it (it launched in the second week of March, just before the first lockdown) one call, that's all covering everything - people who needed help and people offering help.

Our amazing staff and volunteers have helped more than 3700 people with a whole range of support from shopping and food to collecting prescriptions, mental health support, and financial advice.

We were overwhelmed by people offering help throughout the crisis – more than 1000 of them volunteering to help in any way they could – some were out and about collecting and delivering, others took to the phones to chat to those feeling lonely.

We have helped more than 800 people with their prescriptions – 700 of them on a regular basis. And we were able to go shopping for 750 people – more than 600 of them regularly.

The longer the crisis has gone on, we have been able to provide mental health support for an increasing number of people and have been there for more than 300 of them when they most needed it.

For others – more than 250 of them - who have been feeling lonely and isolated, we have been able to provide telephone befriending support and for some those regular phone calls are continuing.

We also continue to make referrals to the fabulous network of foodbanks operating across the Bay under the Torbay Food Alliance, which has to date provided more than 300,000 meals and continue to do so at a rate of around 8000 a week.

Last weekend's announcement that we now face a new strain of the virus, means we need to be even more vigilant and can only see others for one day – Christmas Day and that has hit some very hard.

A lot of people put a lot of hope into Christmas and they are now feeling like the rug has been pulled yet again.

One step forward, too many steps back, all of which is taking its toll on people's health and wellbeing.

We need people as much today as we have ever done.

Christmas can be a desperately lonely time at the best of times, but this year, the prospects for so many people in the Bay are not good.

With that in mind, we will continue to staff the Helpline from (this week and next on reduced hours from 10am to 2pm, Monday to Thursday) on 01803 446022 so that we can continue to recruit volunteers and continue to help those who need them.

We are also on the lookout for people who have specialist mental health skills, in particular, those with counselling skills, who could join our growing team of specialist befrienders.

2020 has been tough, and whilst we can look forward to and hope for a better New Year, we are not out of the woods yet and we know that what we need more than anything right now is each other. People are amazing. Thank goodness.

wonderful



clarity

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# A Happy New Year

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6 January 2021

David Gledhill

## **A HAPPY New Year. Let's hope that 2021 is a marked improvement on what 2020 had to offer.**

It is difficult to believe that just 12 months ago, we were looking forward excitedly to the year ahead and the virus was but just a far off problem in a far off land.

In this column, we were looking back at the year just past, celebrating some of the incredible people we had been lucky enough to meet through our work at Ageing Well, noting how resilient many of them had been in the face of past adversities.

Of course, we also had one eye on the horizon or what we thought would unfold in the year ahead and we were looking forward to working with old and young alike ensuring our communities were stronger as a result.

We had no idea what was just beyond our vision and how all our lives would change as a result.

It seems like a long time ago now, but back in January 2020 the Torbay Community Helpline did not exist, and the work of Torbay Community Development Trust staff was much the same as it always had been – looking out for and working with vulnerable people across the Bay.

We still do, of course, but in ways that we could not have envisaged as first news of the virus arriving in mainland Europe began to dominate media headlines and we watched as Italy and Spain were reduced to chaos.

In February, a month later, it was from Italy that some of the first cases in the country appeared in the Bay brought back by unwitting half term Winter skiers, and the alarm bells were set ringing.

Back then, the plan was to isolate anyone who showed symptoms and those first contacts were whisked away to be treated up country. And initially it looked like the response had been proportionate and successful.

Sadly, optimism was short lived and it quickly became apparent that more would need to be done to help people through this unfolding crisis. Much more.

We called a meeting in the backroom of our offices in Temperance Street to work out what, if anything, we could do to fight back against the virus and to support our communities.

Frankly we had no idea what we were getting into. I don't think anyone did, but we knew we had to do something and the Torbay Community Coronavirus Helpline was born, initially using two numbers, including the one that remains in use today, 01803 446022.

Initially, we were looking to provide advice, support and reassurance and we were joined by colleagues able to offer expertise from Age UK Torbay, Healthwatch Torbay, Brixham Does Care and Citizens Advice Torbay.

Soon afterwards, the proverbial really did hit the fan and with a full lockdown looming, supermarket shelves were cleared and queues snaked around the block with people needing prescriptions from pharmacies.

We realised that we would have to step up a gear and hit the ground running with an emergency response team that was on hand to shop for people who had run out of food and queue for sometimes life-saving drugs.

We were also overwhelmed by offers of help from volunteers willing to join us in whatever way was deemed necessary – staffing the phones, befriending the lonely, shopping for food, collecting prescriptions or helping with the foodbanks.

It became a huge operation, taking more than 16000 calls through the year and touching base with nearly 5000 people. We have learned a lot as we have gone, putting us in the best possible position to provide further assistance as we prepare for the rules to be changed yet again.

A year ago, we were pretty confident that we had strong and resilient communities across the Bay full of resourceful, kind and caring people. Now we are certain of it, and as we go into another national lockdown alongside a roll-out of the vaccination programme, we will be calling on you again.

If you can help your neighbours, then please do get in touch on the regular number 01803 446022 any time between 10 am and 6 pm from Monday to Friday or 9.30 am to 12.30 pm on Saturdays. We look forward to hearing from you.

We are not out of the woods yet.

incredible

# People of Torbay give yourself a pat on the back

13 January 2021

David Gledhill

## **PEOPLE of Torbay give yourself a pat on the back. You are awesome.**

Within hours of putting out an appeal for more volunteers to help with the vaccine roll out and supporting people shielding, our phones were ringing off the hook.

Offers were coming in so quickly we had to find more people to staff the phonelines and still within an hour of the lines opening we had a backlog of more than 60 messages.

Everyone of you wanted to help out in any way you could – some were braced to spend hours outside the Riviera Centre in freezing temperatures to ensure smooth and efficient delivery of the vaccines inside.

Others wanted to know how they could become part of our team of rapid responders, poised to drop everything and head out to pick up shopping or prescriptions for people whose supplies were running dangerously low.

We also spoke to lots of people willing to give up their time to pick up the phone and befriend people they have never met to ensure they hear a friendly voice and do not feel isolated.

During the first lockdown, nearly 1000 people came forward, and we struggled to allocate them all as the crisis deepened, but we did contact as many as we were able and there are a lot of grateful people who were helped when they most needed it.

This time around, we are hoping that during this Lockdown, we will be able to get everything in place to beat this virus once and for all.

But it is going to be a long haul. With a population just shy of 136,000 people, nearly 50% of whom are over the age of 50; the vaccine roll out is going to take time.

Luckily, a lot of people were better prepared this time around and have sorted out their own prescription deliveries and have signed up for online shopping, but that is not the case for everyone.

Not everyone is online and not every pharmacy delivers; furthermore some people cannot afford to stockpile food, so we still need you to help your neighbours in communities across Torbay.

We may have been overwhelmed by the numbers of calls at the weekend and when the phone lines reopened on Monday morning, but after the experience of most of last year when we had more volunteers than we could

possibly make use of. We should not have been surprised.

No matter what we have been through – and let's face it no-one could have predicted the depth of despair this crisis has caused – one thing has shone out time again – the kindness of Torbay's numerous communities.

With your help thus far, we have been able to support nearly 4000 people, and this time around, there are new people turning to us and you are there for them.

Neighbours have helped neighbours, friends have helped friends, relatives have looked out for each other, and the best bit is strangers have been there for people they never have, and in some cases, have yet to meet.

Little did we know of what was to come when we launched the Torbay Community Helpline back in March 2020, but we are all so proud of how it has developed into the place to go to get assistance on a wide range of subjects – as it says in the strapline, One Call, That's All.

On Saturday between the hours of 9.30 am and 12.30 pm, we took more than 150 calls to add to the 16000 plus we have received in the past ten months – most were offering help, but new people are contacting us all the time.

Last week alone, we talked to another 120 people who needed help for the first time, and as the lockdown takes hold, those numbers will increase.

In the meantime, with everyone's help, we can ensure that no-one goes hungry and no-one remains lonely and as many people as possible are delivered to the Riviera Centre in Torquay to get their jobs.

You have proved that when you are needed you are there for us and for each other and with this last herculean push, we can not just make a difference, but together we can beat this.

Thank you.

The Helpline is operating from 10 am to 6 pm, Monday to Friday and from 09.30 am to 12.30 pm on Saturdays. If you need help or can offer help, please call 01803446022.

appeal

# When will it ever end?

20 January 2021

David Gledhill

**WE KNEW this new lockdown was going to be tough for some people, and so it is proving to be. That steely resolve, which came with lockdown one, has been severely tested this time around - when will it ever end?**

None of us has the answer, and that is at the core of many people's thinking as we enter week three of this ongoing nightmare. But we must remain strong because no matter what rules and regulations are brought into play - as they must be - responsibility lies with each and every one of us.

It is becoming something of a cliché, but we are all in this together and we are relying on each other to get us through this difficult time.

Here in Torbay - the strength of our communities, the 1000 plus volunteers who have come forward, the good neighbours, fine friends and caring relatives who have rallied time and again, give us all hope. As we endure this new phase, we also know that vaccinations are being rolled out in their thousands at the Riviera Centre in Torquay. More, we are promised, are heading our way soon.

Now is not the time to take our eyes off the golden goal of a return to normality, where we can, once again, go out unhindered, see friends, greet relatives and not be afraid of strangers.

We will get there and that is why, as calls increase to the Helpline from people suffering through no fault of their own, we must dig ever deeper to help each other, now and in the future.

When we asked for more volunteers, we were inundated with offers of help - hundreds of you offering to marshal arrivals at the vaccination centre, to help chaperone people inside and to return to the essentials of food delivery, prescription collections and telephone befriending

Already many of those volunteers are doing just that, which is just as well because calls to the Helpline have more than doubled compared to last month. Three hundred new people have joined the 4,000 we have already helped in some way over the past ten months.

Numbers of confirmed cases have been climbing, but hopefully peaking, although the number of people

hospitalised in Torbay remains among the lowest in the country. It was heartening when I joined a zoom with Dr Joanne Watson, System Medical Director of Torbay Hospital, last week to hear that morale among the hard pushed staff remains high.

On the same call, though, I was perturbed to learn that some people have still not heard about the Helpline.

Please help spread the word whenever you can - the number is 01803 446022 and we are open from 10 am to 6 pm Monday to Friday and Saturday mornings from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm.

Both Joanne and I used different versions of the same words to express our gratitude to teams of, and I do not use the word lightly, heroes, who are working harder than they have ever worked for longer than they have ever worked.

For me, it was about the staff of numerous charities and organisations and volunteers doing all they can, and for her, the NHS staff, from the cleaners to the consultants - all of whom have found themselves on the frontline - collectively called the key workers.

I came off the call in tears, overwhelmed by the enormity of it all - relief? Gratitude? Pride? All those things, but also with a renewed resolve to do whatever it takes to get through this.

So now might be a good time to remember the latest Government guidance, which is not to go out unless you really have to and, if you do, act as if you are already infected with COVID.

In three words, HANDS, FACE, SPACE - keep washing your hands, wear a face covering at all times when out of the house if possible and give people lots of space when out and about, a minimum of two metres.

Do not see people from outside your bubble - not even outside, unless you are exercising together and do not visit one another's homes.

Hopefully, we are in the final phase of this dreadful crisis, and once again we must all rely on each other to come out the other side. We have endured a great deal, but the end is potentially in sight.

Again that number 01803 446022 if you want need help or want to offer help.

resolve

# What has happened to Ageing Well Torbay?

27 January 2021

David Gledhill

## **YOU MAY BE wondering what has happened to the Ageing Well Torbay (AWT) programme during recent months as all efforts switched to helping people through the coronavirus crisis.**

Much of our regular and more visible work on the ground had to be shelved, but the very people responsible for delivering the work of Ageing Well were also the people best placed to react to the current crisis.

We already knew a lot of the older and vulnerable people in communities across the Bay, so we were able to mobilise quickly to check that they were OK and provide support where necessary.

And as confident as we were, even we were taken aback by the number of people we did not know about until they rang the Helpline and registered their details.

Everyone stepped up and have been going the extra mile ever since, doing what they can on and off line to help communities to help themselves.

Our Ageing Well Staying Put project came into its own, providing not just the number for the Helpline – 01803 446022 – but also the core of volunteers poised to swing into action to help people across the Bay.

YesBrixham, one of AWT's delivery partners were able to provide practical help for people locked down with small but essential jobs, like dripping taps and putting up shelves.

Another, Ellacombe Café provided hot meals and set up a drop in café in the old Torbay Community Development Trust office in Temperance Street in Torquay.

Age UK Torbay's wellbeing coordinators have been working flat out to provide support for the most vulnerable as well as administering a mental health triage service.

Brixham Does Care have done what they do best, looking after the people of Brixham with their own staff doing shopping, prescription collections and providing much needed support throughout.

Citizens Advice Torbay who helped us set up FAIR (Financial Advice, Information and Resilience) peer-to-peer support, have also provided much needed financial support via the Helpline.

Healthwatch Torbay have been getting more people online to ensure as many people as possible remain connected even if they cannot get out to meet people face to face.

Other than that, we have tried to keep everything going as best we can, though many of the myriad of events that took part every day in towns across the Bay have, where possible, gone online.

We even took the Ageing Well Festival onto the web and streamed it live both via our website and with the help of our friends at Riviera FM.

Just as we always have, we are constantly looking for new ways of connecting people and we have come up with some pretty wacky ones to date – the sunflower trail put smiles on faces and lit up the Bay with the Christmas Light trail.

We are also working on a new idea to put smiles on faces as they take their daily exercise or pop to the shops, so watch this space!

Luckily we have had the blessing of our funder, the National Lottery Community Fund who have been happy to allow us to tackle this crisis in any way we saw fit. They have even rewarded us with an extra year to allow us to hopefully finish the work we have been doing for the last six years.

It might not seem like it right now, but residents of the Bay are among the lucky ones, and at the risk of blowing our own trumpet very loudly, it is because of Ageing Well Torbay, as our staff have worked tirelessly through this crisis.

With the help of an army of volunteers – more than 1,000 so far and still climbing – we have been there for anyone who needed our skills or the expertise of our many partners.

Who knows what tomorrow will bring? With vaccinations being rolled out in the Bay in their thousands, we can only hope that the day we return to a more regular way of working is just around the corner.

Like everybody we look forward to that day, when we can meet, talk, laugh and even dance together. We can't wait, because we miss you.

For more details about the Ageing Well Torbay project, visit our website: [www.ageingwelltorbay.com](http://www.ageingwelltorbay.com)

effort

# It is hard to see it through the noise

3 February 2021

David Gledhill

**IT IS SOMETIMES hard to see it through the noise that coronavirus inevitably creates, but there is a lot of good news around at the moment.**

Infection rates are falling across the Bay, due in no small part to the actions each and every one of you have taken to halt the spread. So much so that we once again have some of the lowest number of cases in the country.

However, we, of course, need to stay vigilant. How many times in the last ten months have we hoped that falling figures signified the end, only for yet another blip to come along and cloud the sunny horizon?

But we do have vaccines being rolled out by the thousand Torbay Hospital and at the Riviera Centre in Torquay and we are told that supplies of alternative vaccines that do not require the taxing storage conditions of the Pfizer option, are just around the corner.

Late last week, we also learned that a completely new vaccine is being produced that is not just 89% effective; it has also been proven to be effective against the newer strains of the virus.

Torbay Hospital is, we are told, coping well and staff morale remains high as they continue to treat the worst, although thankfully few, cases whilst working in tandem with the Nightingale Hospital in Exeter to ensure non-COVID treatments continue.

GPs' surgeries continue to organise and mobilise to ensure that there is a steady flow of vaccine recipients arriving at the vaccine centre whilst managing to deal with an endless stream of calls back at the surgery.

One hundred and forty seven volunteers are working side by side with NHS staff at the Riviera Centre to ensure the operations run smoothly, and maintaining a steady and efficient flow in and out.

We have another two hundred plus volunteers waiting in the wings ready to take their place on shifts that not only marshal arrivals but chaperone people as they pass through reception.

We have been overwhelmed by the kindness shown by the people of Torbay and have been delighted by the response to the many appeals we have made for extra help, each appeal never failing to set the Helpline phones alight with offers.

We asked for your help with delivering prescriptions and collecting shopping and you rose to the challenge. We asked for your help calling people who were otherwise lonely and isolated and lend a friendly, caring ear.

More recently, we appealed for help with specialist befrienders, and again, you came forward to offer counselling and expertise to tackle the rising number of instances of people whose mental health is suffering.

Each time we have asked for money or donations for the foodbanks, they have arrived almost immediately and the Torbay Food Alliance is now providing more than 10,000 meals a week.

You organised yourselves into Good Neighbour Schemes to support each other with check-ins, phone calls and running errands for each other and there are now nearly 70 such groups across the Bay.

To date, an incredible 1300 people have offered their services at various points during the ten month long crisis – that is a phenomenal one in 100 of Torbay's population.

Way back in the dim and distant past that was Lockdown One we coined the phrase #TorbayKind, but even that does not really go far enough – though I am struggling to find the words that cover this level of generosity.

We have said thank you many times, but it can never be enough, though we will continue to say as often as we can.

If you have ever doubted the strength and resilience of the communities in this Bay, put it aside, you are very lucky to live here whether here is in Torquay, Brixham or Paignton.

Your neighbours are your friends, your new acquaintances are your support network and the many staff and volunteers who have worked tirelessly and unselfishly for the last 317 days are your safety net.

Thank you, thank you, a thousand times thank you.

The helpline is available from 10 am to 6 pm from Monday to Friday and from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm on Saturday's on 01803 446022

vigilant

# There is good reason for optimism

10 February 2021

*David Gledhill*

## **ANOTHER week in lockdown, but there is good reason for optimism that we will come out of this sooner rather than later.**

The vaccines are being rolled out across the Bay, with most still being delivered at the Riviera Centre in Torquay, where there is an endless stream of visitors receiving their jabs.

Our volunteer marshals are braving freezing temperatures for anything from three to four and a quarter hours in three shifts every day from 8 am until 6.30 pm every day, Monday to Saturday.

But far from complaining people are asking for more shifts than we can give them and our Helpline on 01803 446022 is receiving more offers to marshal and chaperone every hour that it is open from 10 am to 6 pm, Monday to Friday and from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm on Saturdays.

If we haven't called you up yet to help with vaccinations, don't worry, we have you on our system, and we will get to you because we are all in this for the long haul until everyone in the Bay who wants a vaccination, has had one.

We have added a new layer of COVID security for all who step up to help at the Riviera Centre with lateral flow testing carried out every three or four days, or at the end of the shift, depending on how often people are working.

The test gives everyone – volunteers, patients and medical staff that extra bit of reassurance that we are remaining on top of the virus as we strive to eliminate it altogether.

The Torbay Community Helpline, which is the pivot for all this activity, has now been open and taking calls for more than 320 days, and it has received more than 17,000 calls from people offering help and from people needing help.

From its humble beginnings (we had no idea what to expect) it has grown to provide expertise in all sorts of areas that were never envisaged, but determination has made sure the Helpline lives up to its boast – one call, that's all.

We like to think that if we can't answer your question immediately, we will find the answer for you, though we now have most bases covered from food and wellbeing through to finances and mental health.

And we are still finding new people that we have never dealt before – another 125 people last week – some volunteering, others needing the help of those volunteers – meaning that we have now been contacted by more than 5,550 people.

Calls are coming in at the rate of up to 100 a day, pushing the total received to more than 17,100, and each call is a fresh challenge in the race to make sure that no-one goes hungry and no one is left isolated.

Our call handlers – a mix of staff from our partner organisations as well as volunteers, are finding the calls longer and more complex as the requests become ever more perplexing.

No longer are the calls simply about having some shopping done or having a prescription collected as they were at the beginning of lockdown one. They now combine a need for food and medications with other more involved issues around mental health and finances.

We ask all callers to the Helpline about their mood and flag those that need further help, but in the last few months, we have helped triage more than 600 people whose mental health is suffering, and we see more every day.

Hand in hand with mental health go some of the triggers, and that too is reflected in an increase in calls from people who need a food parcel, some for whom food poverty is a new reality, never faced before.

Furloughed and suddenly out of work people are way past feeling the pinch, they are facing the pain of having had no salaried income for months, and they need help sorting out their finances as they go into meltdown.

The Torbay Food Alliance, which represents all the food banks across the Bay, estimates that they are providing around 10000 meals a week and given the economic impact of the virus, that can only get worse.

As with the vaccinations, we are on a long journey, a journey that we neither know the distance nor the duration; all we know is that we are in it for the long haul.

optimism

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# This morning I had a brief taste of my pre-covid life.

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17 February 2021

Christine Durrant

*The Christine Durrant is the community builder for Preston. Here she recounts the far reaching effects of the Coronavirus Crisis on both herself and the people she is normally in regular face to face contact with.*

**THIS MORNING I had a brief taste of my pre-covid life. I walked along the beach from Preston Sands to Goodrington Sands and got chatting to people along the way – keeping a good two metres apart as I want to stay safe and keep others safe. However, I also needed to connect with people and those who connected with me this morning were feeling the same way.**

No matter how brief the encounter, it felt good to speak face to face. We talked of many things, retirement, dogs, lockdown, volunteering opportunities. The ups and downs of lockdown life and what we were doing to keep sane. I learned from them and I hope they learned from me. That is what community is all about, living and learning alongside each other.

The life of a community builder is all about connection and connectors. What do I mean by connectors? These are the people who just love to connect people they know with each other. You know, the person you would go to in order to find a reliable decorator, doctor or dentist. The one who sets you up with a new friend just because s/he is so sure you will both get on. Connectors have nothing to gain personally from these introductions; they just love it when they bring strangers together because of the joy that strangers becoming friends brings.

Community builders spend their working lives building relationships and connecting people together. We go where the energy is. When we find someone, who has the passion to make changes in their community, our hearts sing and we work alongside them to give them as much support as they need to get the show on the road. Sometimes the input is very small.

Take Kath. She met me at a coffee morning. Her great desire was to provide support for anyone whose partner had either gone into a care home or had died. Not just any carer but carers whose partners had dementia. This is a debilitating disease and it involves 24/7 care so when that burden of care is lifted it also leaves a gaping hole in the life of the carer. Suddenly they are alone with no focus for their lives. They have long since had to give up

friendships that took them away from their caring responsibilities and so have become isolated.

Kath and I wrote a list of all the people who we knew between us who fell into this category and then we invited them to the pub. 'But what shall we tell them it's for?' asked Kath. 'A drink', I replied.

Eighteen people turned up for a drink. We sat at two tables and asked a simple question: 'In your ideal world, what would you like to do?' Ideas were many and varied, but one stood out to us as perfect and easy to manage. 'I'd like to go out for Sunday lunch. You can't cook a roast for one.'

So that's what they did. Kath booked a table for all those who wanted to come and they went out for Sunday lunch. Pre-covid, they were doing that every month. Note, Kath did that. I have remained in the background, ready to support if needed, but Kath leads the group. Pre-covid, Kath would also book theatre and cinema trips for them so they had things to look forward to between Sunday lunches.

That was back in 2016 and they are still going strong.

Friends have introduced other friends and the group has continued to grow and support one another. I don't think there is much talk of dementia, but that is a common thread that binds many of them – the knowledge that these people understand what it is or has been like.

Throughout the lockdowns they have stayed in touch by phone and when it was allowed between lockdowns, some of them even met for lunch. It didn't take much watering for this seed to grow.

To find out who your community builder is go to: <https://ageingwelltorbay.com/delivery-partners/community-builders/> or ring 01803 212638.

interconnected

# A light at the end of the tunnel 24 February 2021

David Gledhill

## **AT LAST, there is a light at the end of the tunnel, but there can still be no cause for complacency no matter what.**

We have managed to keep COVID rates in the Bay low through hard work and diligence, and if we get it wrong this time, we know what the consequences will be.

We have seen too many people suffer as a result of this terrible virus, both directly through illness and death but also with mental health issues, economic meltdown and financial hardship.

It is important, as we prepare to relax the rules over a four-month period (all being well), that we remember the people who will not be coming out of this crisis at all – the 141 of our friends, neighbours and relatives who have died as a result.

But we do have something to look forward to as the result of an unprecedented vaccine programme that has been rolling out across the Bay and across the whole of the country.

To date, nearly 18 million jabs have been delivered, with tens of thousands of those being administered at the Riviera Centre in Torquay and the Horizon centre at the Torbay Hospital.

In some areas of some of our towns, many more older people have had the jab than not and the ages of the people now receiving their jabs is falling every day as the programme targets younger people.

New statistics show that even after the first jab, there is between 70 and 85% less chance of you being hospitalised if you are still unlucky enough to get the virus. That is shown to increase after the second injection.

Unlike at the end of previous lockdowns, we have something concrete to look forward to – a phased return to something of normality, but we will still be a long way from returning to the lives we lived before all this started a year ago.

For some, it will mean an end to home schooling and all the pressures that brings, as children return to school on March 8th – a hugely important step on so many different levels.

From the same date (just two weeks away), we will also be able to meet one other person outdoors to sit and have a chat on a park bench or enjoy a take away coffee together.

For many of us, the next significant date in the calendar is still more than a month away (March 29th) when, if everything goes to plan, we will be able to once again follow the rule of six from two households whilst outdoors.

However, it will not be until the effects of that return have been monitored and analysed that non-essential retail will re-open on April 12th with shops, hairdressers, and beauty salons once again being able to greet their loyal customers.

Pubs and restaurants will also re-open, albeit serving food and drink outside, so we will have to hope for better weather by then because it will not be until May 17th that they will be allowed to serve indoors again.

June 21st is the target date for a relaxation of all legal limits on social contact though it should be noted there are a lot of ifs and buts along the way and we should not lose sight of the long the long term effects and the damage already done by this crisis.

With that in mind, the Helpline on 01803 446022 will be available throughout and beyond because the issues mentioned earlier including mental health, and financial hardship, will be with us for years to come and we will be there for them whatever the problem – one call, that's all.

And the Torbay Food Alliance, which is already delivering 10000 meals a week to households who are struggling across the Bay expect things to get worse before they get better.

People have found this lockdown 3 harder than the previous two, which could be because they have been worn down by the first two or simply because they are locked down in what is regarded by many as the most miserable part of the year anyway.

Don't plan to throw away your mask, you may well still need it and we must all remain cautious until we know for sure that we have beaten this. And the hugs that so many of us yearn for, remain for now, something that we can only dream about.

# consequence



# sharing

# Are we out of the woods?

3 March 2021

David Gledhill

## **THE NIGHTS are getting lighter, moods are lifting, and we all could be forgiven for thinking we are out of the woods.**

We aren't. Not by a long way.

Stage one of the road to recovery will be completed next week with the return of children to school, causing parents across the Bay to breathe a collective sigh of relief, but the effects of that will not be known for some weeks to come.

All being well, it will be a success, and our youngest generations will be able to settle down to catch up on their much needed formative education, releasing parents from home-schooling and reuniting school friends.

For the rest of us, we have March 29th to look forward to when we will be able to again follow the rule of six and meet up with another household outdoors (weather allowing, of course).

It is then but a few weeks before all shops reopen (April 12th), along with pubs and restaurants that will be allowed to serve outdoors, and you will be able to finally get that well overdue haircut.

If we get it right, then May 17th will see a further relaxation with larger outdoor gatherings, bigger weddings and funerals and, significantly for the tourist trade in the Bay, the re-opening of overnight accommodation such as hotels and guest houses.

May 17th will also see the resurgence of indoor and outdoor adult sport, which will mean a return to the terraces of your favourite club to cheer on the home side as well as the, much awaited, reappearance of live entertainment, albeit with limited crowd numbers for both.

And finally, subject to the unpredictable vagaries of COVID and any new strains, there will be a full return to a new normal on June 21st. However, getting to that desired state is going to be a long, perilous journey and it is still 75 days away.

And it should be remembered that whilst June 21st is a significant date for most of us, it is not for all and there will remain large numbers of people who will continue to suffer from the fall out from this crisis.

Vaccinations continue apace at the Riviera Centre in Torquay and tens of thousands of people now benefit from the protection that the first jab brings,

reducing their chances of being hospitalised should they get the virus.

The average age of vaccination recipients is falling fast and once everyone who wants one has had one, then the whole exercise will be repeated with a second round of jabs over the coming months.

Sadly though, vaccinations cannot mend broken hearts, bring back financial security or instantly improve damaged mental health, those are issues that we will take with us into the new normal.

The economy has been severely damaged and behind every failed business is a cohort of individuals whose lives have changed beyond recognition. For them, the fightback is only just beginning.

Across the Bay, thousands of people have been furloughed and for some, when that ends, there will be no job to go back to, meaning mounting financial pressures and a struggle to put food on the table.

Unemployment is no respecter of age, but it is becoming clear that young people have been hit hardest as a result of this pandemic and that will continue to take its toll for many years to come.

The Helpline on 01803 446022 continues to receive calls from people we have not heard from before adding to the more than 4,500 people we have already helped in some way.

Mental health continues to be the big problem for some people, as do financial issues, which can lead to a complex web of other difficulties with which they need urgent assistance.

We are receiving growing numbers of calls from people suffering domestic abuse as the ongoing effects of being locked down in the same space for so long erupts into violence.

The Helpline, which started as a way of making sure no-one in the Bay went hungry and no one was left isolated, has evolved into a One Call, That's All service, which will continue to operate long after most of us have put these last awful 12 months behind us.

If you need help, don't hesitate – the Helpline is here for you and someone is available to take your call six days a week – Monday to Friday from 10 am to 6 pm and on Saturdays from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm.

reopen

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# Prepared to do whatever it takes 10 March 2021

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David Gledhill

**JUST over a year ago, I wrote in this column about how I believed that volunteering had lost its shine and was no longer a mainstay of most people's lives.**

It caused barely a ripple, though I was taken to task by a former colleague who believed I had overstepped the mark and been disrespectful of the many people who were giving freely of their time.

That was never my intention, but I did believe just twelve months ago that the word volunteering had acquired negative connotations and had become tied up in red tape and formality.

Fast forward one year, and I am delighted to be able to eat my words – all 750 of them. The coronavirus crisis has proved that not only are people willing to volunteer, they are prepared to do whatever it takes for their neighbours and friends.

Every appeal that we have made for help – and we have made quite a few during this pandemic – has taken us aback, overwhelming us (in a good way) with the sheer numbers of volunteers that have come forward.

But it is not just the stepping forward that has sometimes left us lost for words, but the sheer effort behind those offers that just keep on giving and seem to be indefatigable.

We wish now that we could have come up with a way of recording, not just the number of volunteers that came forward, but a way of calculating the vast number of hours that have been given freely.

We know that nearly one in a hundred of the total population of the Bay (c.135,000) have rung our Helpline to register their offers, but we also know in addition to those 1300 people, there are likely thousands more who are simply getting on with helping their neighbours, friends and relatives, without a second thought.

Helping each other through the last 360 plus days seems to be something that has come naturally. So many people have organised themselves and others to ensure that no-one in the Bay goes hungry and no one in the Bay becomes isolated.

Neighbours who have barely exchanged two words before have become firm friends, and there are tens of thousands of people living here who will be forever grateful for the kindness shown by others.

They haven't thought twice about picking up the phone to check in or asking if anyone needs anything as they visit the shops or pick up their medications from pharmacies.

Others have organised themselves into Good Neighbour Support groups bringing together the residents of their streets or local communities to ensure that the phrase 'we are all in this together' has meaning.

Without exception, our volunteers and those that have signed up for the NHS volunteer scheme have gone the extra mile for people they might not have known before this crisis began

At the Riviera Centre in Torquay, where the majority of vaccinations have been delivered so far, we have had people clamouring to stand outside in the cold, windswept car park to make sure the operation continues efficiently.

Without their help, who knows how many of the 55,648 (as of February 28th) vaccinations might have been delivered? And who can put a value on the gratitude felt by so many for a job well done?

As we move towards the end of what we all hope is the last of the lockdowns, it is to be hoped that none of us will forget the sometimes herculean efforts made by so many people, often putting others before themselves.

We have collectively proved in Torbay that our communities are strong and resilient and are prepared to step up when the call comes, and we can all rely on each other when the going gets tough.

But what of the future? When the memories of COVID begin to fade and we learn to cope with new structures in our lives, what then? Hopefully, the spirit of volunteering will continue as there are always people who need our help.

We will endeavour to stay in touch with our volunteers as we find ways to celebrate their achievements because those accomplishments must never be forgotten.

Hopefully, many will be minded to keep on going, to find new ways to make a difference.

One good way to find new opportunities to volunteer is via the Torbay Together website. Sign up today at: <https://torbaytogether.org.uk/>

grateful

# The first anniversary of the Helpline

17 March 2021

David Gledhill

## **AT THE RISK of blowing our own trumpet, we have been celebrating here at the Torbay Community Development Trust this week.**

We have reached a landmark – one that we couldn't have ever planned for – the first anniversary of the Torbay Community Helpline.

One year ago, on March 16th 2020, the Helpline was launched and we took our first calls from people worried about the impending lockdown that followed exactly a week later, on March 23rd.

We had no idea what to expect, and from that very first call, we have been running, thankfully successfully, to keep up with the needs of the people of Torbay, thousands of whom were obliged to stay in their own homes.

Initially, it was all about shopping and prescription pick up from pharmacies. Who can forget the empty shelves in supermarkets as tinned, dried and frozen food became premium goods along with, bizarrely, toilet rolls?

Our rapid response team initially made up mainly of our Community Builders joined queues that snaked around the block and waited patiently for hours outside chemist shops.

Fortunately, we had taken the precaution of consulting with our partners; initially, Brixham Does Care, Age UK Torbay, Citizens Advice Torbay and Healthwatch Torbay and we were able to stay on top of spiralling demand.

But we were also able to mobilise an army of volunteers, all keen to help their friends, relatives, and neighbours. It was a mobilisation the likes of which we have not seen in the Bay outside World Wars.

It wasn't long before we recognised that the needs of people isolated in their own homes went way beyond food and medications and the Helpline evolved accordingly.

New partners joined us, and we were soon able to offer services, such as telephone befriending for people who just needed to hear a friendly voice, perhaps the only other person they had spoken to that week,

We also developed a mental health triage service for those really struggling and as the economic consequences began to bite hard, we also added financial assistance for those people who suddenly found themselves up against it.

The Torbay Food Alliance pulled together more than ten foodbanks from across Torbay to source food on an enormous scale, which was no mean feat in the early days when cheap and bulk food became ever more scarce.

And yet, due in no part to the strength and resilience of our communities in the Bay, we won out. We didn't just help each other, but we also took the coronavirus threat seriously and with a couple of exceptions – spikes in Brixham and parts of Torquay -our figures remained relatively low throughout.

To date, just three per cent of the Torbay population (4,100 people) that have been tested have had the virus and sadly, 3.8 per cent of those died. However, for the most part, our figures have been consistently well below the national average.

That has to be because we, the people of Torbay, genuinely believed that we were all in this together and our stats over the last year reflect that.

The Helpline has taken just short of 19,000 calls and we have been contacted by 5,800 people – around 4,500 requesting help and an incredible 1300 people offering their help to others.

More than 470,000 meals have been delivered, at the rate of around 10,000 a week, to individuals and whole families – many of whom have never struggled to put food on the table before.

We have been there for nearly 700 people whose mental health has suffered through the crisis and have provided a way out of isolation with our telephone befriending service for hundreds more.

More recently, we have helped ensure the vaccinations are delivered quickly and efficiently at the Riviera Centre in Torquay with hundreds of volunteer marshals. To date, 61,684 people have had their jabs, an impressive 45% of the population.

Everything we have done has been in partnership, whether that be with the other charities and organisations already mentioned, Torbay Council and the Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust, and many, many more.

But most of all, the effort has ultimately relied on our volunteers and as well as celebrating one year, we would like to find a way of commemorating it so that the kindness is never forgotten. If you have any ideas, please drop me an email to [davidgledhill@torbaycdt.org.uk](mailto:davidgledhill@torbaycdt.org.uk).

commemorate

# Fed up? Rest assured, you are not alone.

24 March 2021

David Gledhill

## **FED UP? Rest assured, you are not alone. We all are, but finally, there is light at the end of the tunnel.**

As the evenings burst into life as the clocks go forward next weekend, we will finally have something to do with all that time instead of sitting in our homes awaiting the end of this, the most difficult of the lockdowns – lockdown three.

By the time we are fully out of this lockdown, we will have spent the best part of five months under restrictions, far longer than the original lockdown, which started in March last year.

For most of us, 2020 was a non-event, and all we can do is look forward to the second half of 2021 with a degree of optimism – even if the easing does not stretch to holidays abroad.

Here in Torbay, we are braced for an influx of tourists and visitors who will be heading to our towns and beaches for the only type of holidays available to them – staycations, and as we always do, we will give them the full Torbay welcome

But what of us, the residents? Hopefully, we have a lot to look forward to, starting as soon as next week (March 29th), when two households will again be allowed to mix outside – fingers crossed for good weather.

Next Monday also marks the return of outdoor sports and leisure facilities, so it will be back to the golf course for those who play and the opportunity to get back out onto the water for others.

At TCDT, we have been giving a lot of thought to how we re-introduce the many activities that were a big part of Ageing Well, and whilst the rules do not yet allow a full return; planning has begun in earnest.

For many of our team, the lockdowns have been one long frustration given that they normally work hard to help communities come together rather than facilitate keeping them apart.

Coffee morning, tea dances, quizzes, walks, workshops, film clubs and indoor or outdoor exercise groups have all had to be either taken online (for those that have access to digital, which not everyone does), onto the phone or abandoned altogether.

Instead, we have been forced to find new ways of keeping in touch with people and ensuring as much as possible that no one in the Bay is lonely or, worse, isolated as a result of this pandemic.

Now, finally, we are looking forward, and there is an air of optimism that as a result of vaccinations that have been delivered to around 65,000 people so far and the commitment of us all to each other's health and wellbeing, we will once again be able to begin the long journey back to the new 'normal'.

It will not be the same for everyone – some will choose to exercise caution, others will choose not to embrace it all until they are certain that all danger has passed and we must respect the individual's decision either way.

However, across the Bay, there are tens of thousands of people champing at the bit, ready to go, in whatever way they can and that is what we have begun planning for – ways of once again coming together in a safe and sensible way.

It may well be that instead of a big bang – a series of big celebrations - that it will be more sensible to start gently with a whole host of smaller events and gatherings until confidence grows.

Weather allowing, we will be looking at organising as many events as we can outdoors, but there will also be a structured return to our regular venues such as halls, hotels and cafes, but we need to stick to the timetable as set out by the Government, every step of the way.

Some will choose to remain away from gatherings of any kind and we will continue to staff the Helpline on 01803 446022 for those who need us, for whatever reasons.

Our slogan, One Call, That's All, is as true today as it was at the height of this crisis and we are very aware that for some, the problems are getting worse, not better and for others, the difficulties are yet to come.

For that reason, the Helpline will continue to be available from 10 am until 6 pm, Monday to Friday and from 9.30 am until 12.30 pm on Saturday.

wellbeing

# We need your help, please!

31 March 2021

David Gledhill

## **WE NEED your help, please!**

At last, there has been some easing of what has seemed like an eternal lockdown with two households again being allowed to mix outdoors, following the rule of six.

And what a week for it to happen - an extra hour of daylight in the evening and the welcome return of the sun, which always puts smiles on faces. Before we know where we are, the shops will reopen and pubs and restaurants will be able to serve outside (April 12th).

But we must remain vigilant, and here at the Torbay Community Development Trust and Ageing Well Torbay, we have been looking at ways of taking advantage of the relaxation of the rules as we go forward.

Which is where you come in; we need to know what you want, when you want it and how you want it delivering – whether it be coffee mornings, socials, exercise classes – in fact, rules allowing whatever you need.

Obviously, we have a long way to go to June 21st when legal enforcement of all the rules is potentially relaxed and many people will choose to take longer to feel that they are once again safe when mixing with people outside their family or social bubble.

We want to be ready to welcome you back in whatever form that gathering takes, and we want to be on hand for those of you that might need a little extra help emerging once again.

None of us should ever underestimate the impact these three lockdowns and numerous other tier restrictions have had on individuals, and it is important that we all move at our own pace, staying in our comfort zones.

We continue to see the fall out of this crisis via the Helpline, which continues to operate between 10 am and 6 pm from Monday to Friday and on Saturday's between 9.30 am and 12.30pm on 01803 446022.

And we expect to continue to see the effects for months, if not years to come. In the last week alone, we were contacted by just short of 50 new people, often with complex needs – some through isolation, some for mental health issues and others suffering financial problems as a result of the pandemic.

That is why, as we finally come out of this mess, we will continue to operate the Helpline with our dedicated call handlers, some staff, some volunteers, so that you do not have to face your problems alone – remember whatever the issue – One Call, That's All.

There are those that say that our Community Builders have come into their own during this crisis and whilst there is a lot of truth in that, as they have been working frontline and behind the scenes to strengthen our communities, just as they always have.

However, they want the opportunity to come off the frontline and get back to doing what they do best, helping communities and individuals to be the very best that they can be.

That is where you come in. Our Community Builders are champing at the bit, waiting for your calls and your emails to get everything going again in the safest way possible, given the circumstances.

They want to be able to help organise events or rekindle old ones, renew acquaintances and reinvigorate friendships to make sure that no one in the Bay is isolated or lonely.

You can find a list of all our Community Builders on the Torbay Community Development Trust under the drop menu About Us/Who We are or you can ring us on 01803 212638 or drop us an email to [info@torbaycdt.org.uk](mailto:info@torbaycdt.org.uk).

We have all been on an incredible journey – one that none of us could ever have predicted, and overall, we are not in bad shape – not least because our communities have rallied and remained strong and resilient.

Now, as we take the first tentative steps back to the new 'normal', we have the opportunity not just to go back to what we were doing, but it also gives us the chance to do something new, to meet new people.

If the weather holds, then we will be looking at lots of new outdoor activities, and then as confidence builds, we will venture back inside – all dependent on us all remaining vigilant and taking responsibility for each other's wellbeing.

These are exciting times and we look forward to hearing from you.

impact

# Torbay Community Development Trust



**Developing stronger communities across Torbay**

**Encouraging people to do what they do best**

**Supporting groups to thrive**

**Making connections and stimulating co-operation**

**Bringing people together**

Established following discussions with more than 100 voluntary sector representatives, Torbay Community Development Trust has works to make Torbay a place where all people feel included. The Trust builds on existing strengths where key assets are people in their environment.

**We have so much to share. Call us for a chat. Come visit and see for yourselves or let us train you and your people in the Torbay Way.**

Call us on +44 **07766025487**

Email **[simonsherbeksky@torbaycdt.org.uk](mailto:simonsherbeksky@torbaycdt.org.uk)**

Check out our training prospectus at

**[www.torbaycdt.org.uk](http://www.torbaycdt.org.uk)**



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**Torbay** Community  
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One call - that's all  
01803 446022

**Step One**

Torbay  
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