

Sunderland City Council- COVID Champions

The
Strategy
Unit.



Overview

Reference: 31

Location: Sunderland

Target Group: Multiple

Initiative type:

Community engagement
and advocacy

Contact

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Top Tip

Listen to and work alongside residents and community leaders- if the vaccination programme is not working, talk to people and find out why and use this information to tailor your approach.

Why is this important to us?

In Sunderland, from the outset of the COVID pandemic, we established community hubs. We supported our residents, coordinated volunteering and shared health messaging, as well as arranged activities to support those who were feeling isolated and vulnerable. Due to this partnership working with voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, we were aware vaccine uptake was lower in some vulnerable groups- including BAME communities, Asylum Seekers, people experiencing homelessness, armed forces veterans, LGBT groups and people in socioeconomically deprived areas. Through our work with these organisations, we also knew of lower access and uptake due to barriers to GP registration in asylum seeker groups. As we moved through the vaccination programme, we also started to see that younger people might be hesitant.

What are we doing?

Sunderland City Council launched the COVID Champions initiative in December 2020 to recruit residents to support our work in responding to COVID-19. COVID Champions cascade key COVID-19 messages through their own communities, using informal social networks such as Facebook, e-mail, and WhatsApp. They also provide feedback, ideas, and local intelligence on what is, or is not working. We have worked with VCS groups across the city, supporting them to apply for the funding, which enables them to deliver targeted Community Champion activities. Our VCS partners are delivering a range of activities to meet with and encourage residents across the city to have their vaccination; they are sharing important COVID safety messages, hosting community centre events and street dances, running several pop-up vaccination clinics. We meet with all our VCS partners once a fortnight to understand what is working and where to improve, helping us to understand what is going on in the community, enabling us to adjust our approach based on the specific needs of residents and communities.

Who is involved?

The Community Resilience Service at Sunderland City Council worked in partnership with a group of public and VCS organisations. Including the five Area VCS Networks, police, housing provider Gentoo, Sunderland College, Sunderland BME Network, Sunderland Veterans Forum, Disability Network and Sunderland CCG and GP Alliance – we liaised directly with the CCG lead for the vaccination programme.

What works for us?

Joint-partnership working and being able to award funding to VCS partners so that they can recruit paid volunteers – including our work with communities of armed forces veterans and LGBT communities, we have reached 46,419 people in total with a high percentage of residents accessing their vaccination. Through the clinics, we have also facilitated 50 vaccinations in a local mosque and 97 for asylum seekers and refugees- with a further vaccination clinic planned in a local Gurdwara in April. This testifies to the success of our joint-partnership approach between the NHS, local council, and VCS organisations.