

# Advice and support for community organisations





Maybe you're running a group, managing a community building or group of volunteers, or you're reading this as a volunteer working directly with the public.

First of all, we'd like to say a massive THANK YOU!

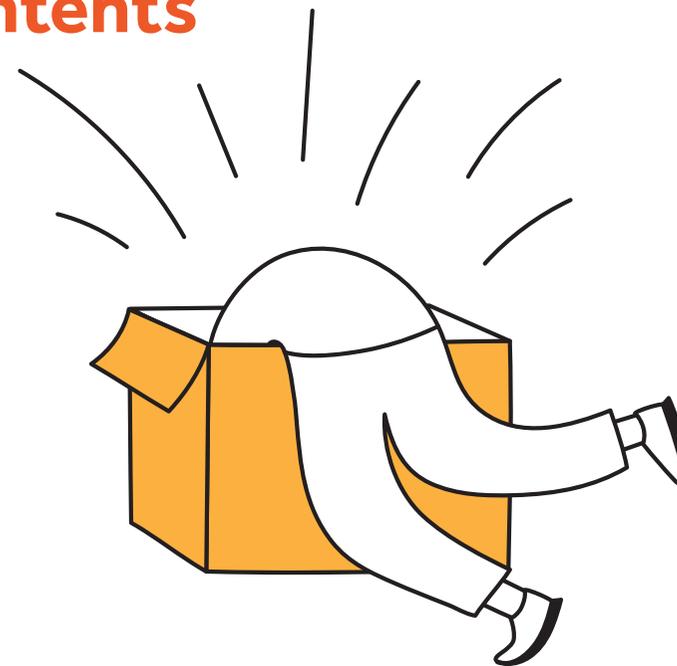
You have such an important role – helping individuals in need, connecting people and ensuring that we have vibrant, supportive communities in which to live.

When Covid-19 hit, many community groups based in cafés, community halls and public venues across Somerset, were forced to close. We lost the opportunity to socialise and enjoy human contact and friendship.

**This booklet has been designed with people and spaces in mind – to help those who want to get out and about to gather safely again and to support community spaces to reopen.**

If you would like this information in another format or language, please visit:  
[www.sparksomerset.org.uk/resources/covid-confident-communities](http://www.sparksomerset.org.uk/resources/covid-confident-communities)

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# How to re-open safely



If you are involved in running a community group, we recommend that you complete a Covid-19 Risk Assessment prior to meeting up again which covers the following:

- Social distancing and capacity/space
- Safe access into and out of the building
- Hygiene and face coverings
- Taking account of vulnerable people
- Track and Trace
- Travel and parking

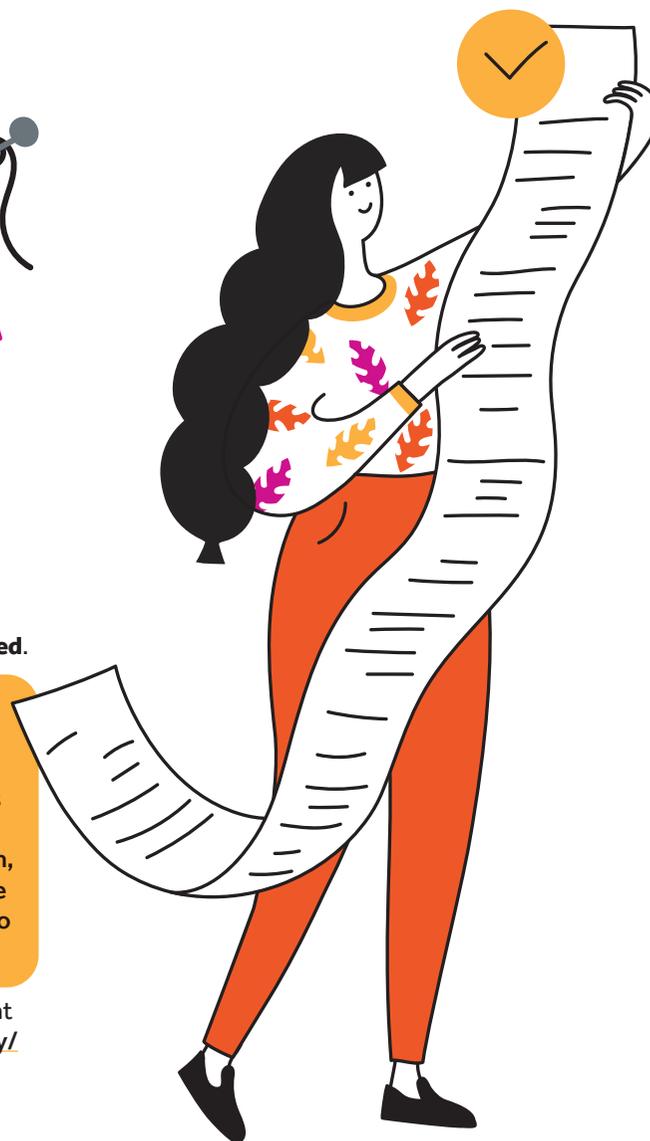
Here's a link to some risk assessment templates for different volunteering activities and use of community buildings: [www.volunteermatters.org.uk/volunteer-safely](http://www.volunteermatters.org.uk/volunteer-safely)

Here's a helpful link for community and social groups with lots of advice on meeting safely: [www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/covid-19-regulations-for-community-groups](http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/covid-19-regulations-for-community-groups)

An organisation that continued to meet up successfully in 2020 were **Frome Men's Shed**.

"On completion of our Covid Risk Assessment, we installed a Covid-safe reception desk equipped with PPE and ensured that all workstations and desks had sanitiser and cleaning equipment. We also implemented a one-way system, a process for limiting numbers to ensure adequate self-distancing, and signage to remind 'Shedders' of the guidelines."

You can find a link to their Risk Assessment here: [www.fromeshed.org.uk/community/frome-shed-12888/covid](http://www.fromeshed.org.uk/community/frome-shed-12888/covid)



## Checklist to help you reopen your community building safely:

- Carry out Covid-19 risk assessments and ask your hirers to do the same
- Consider enhanced cleaning requirements and how to implement them
- Discuss with any employees about changes in work patterns
- Provide hand sanitiser and good washing facilities, especially considering the safe use of toilets
- Provide signage e.g. Covid secure certificate, QR code poster, PHE posters
- Ensure you have a test and trace system in place
- Consult with your regular user groups on changing needs and adaptations
- Plan for social distancing arrangements, in meeting spaces, corridors, exits and entrances, and review your capacity limits
- Carry out regular health and safety risk assessments of the whole premises and ensure your fire risk assessment is up-to-date
- Flush through the water system to remove any risk of Legionella
- Update your marketing and communications with new information and special conditions of hire
- Advise your insurance company of your plans

If you manage a community building, then the **Community Council for Somerset (CCS)** can help: [info@somersetccc.org.uk](mailto:info@somersetccc.org.uk) or call **01823 331222**.

Comprehensive guidance can also be downloaded here: [www.acre.org.uk/rural-issues/providing-advice-and-guidance-to-help-groups.php](http://www.acre.org.uk/rural-issues/providing-advice-and-guidance-to-help-groups.php)

# Support for your group



## Funding support

If you are involved in running a community facility or a group you may be able to access some funding to support your day-to-day activities.

Spark Somerset's Funding Team is ready and willing to help you navigate the different types of funding streams and guide you through with expert support and advice.

Please call the Spark office on **01458 550973** or contact the team directly to see how they can support you on a one-to-one basis: [support@sparksomerset.org.uk](mailto:support@sparksomerset.org.uk)

Take a look at the Spark Somerset Funding Portal for information, advice and a searchable database of funders: [www.sparksomerset.org.uk/funding](http://www.sparksomerset.org.uk/funding)

## Training for your staff and volunteers

Did you know that we also offer affordable training to charities and community groups across Somerset?

Our workshops are designed to strengthen skills and knowledge within the local voluntary sector.

Whether you're a Volunteer Coordinator looking for support on managing volunteers, a Trustee seeking bid writing support, or a manager who is looking for Mental Health Awareness training for your staff or volunteers, our training team is on hand to discuss your needs.

Visit [www.sparksomerset.org.uk/training](http://www.sparksomerset.org.uk/training) or call for advice on **01458 550973**

## Recruiting volunteers

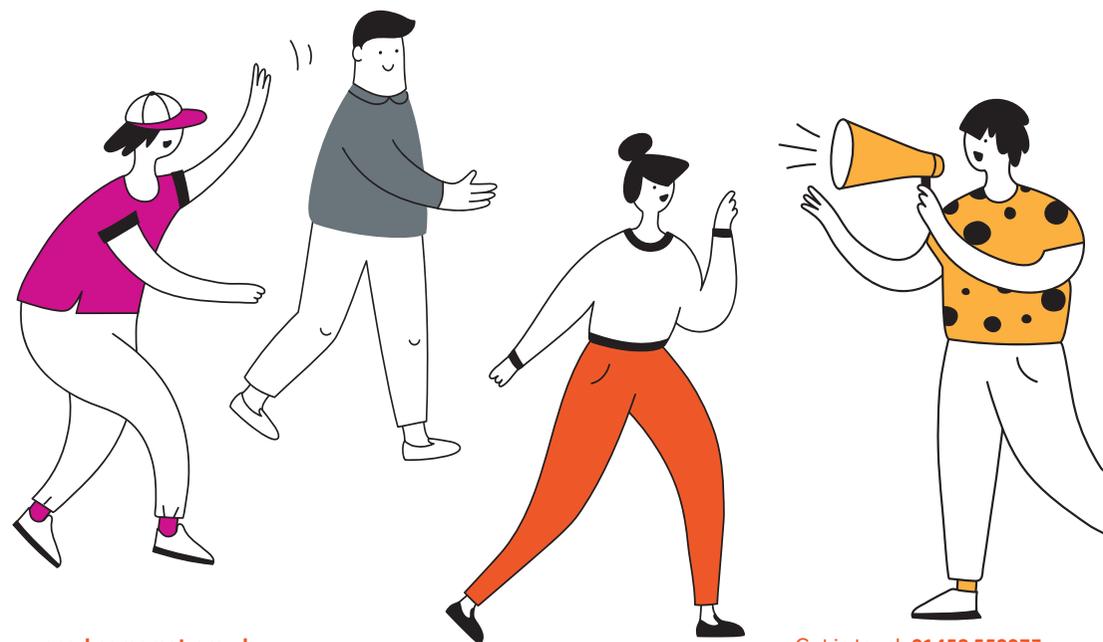
As we emerge from lockdown, we know that many community groups will be keen to welcome their volunteers back – and perhaps to attract more.

Covid-19 has seen a huge volunteer response across Somerset and indeed across the country. If you'd like to recruit more volunteers to support your group, we're here to help.

Our online volunteering platform, **Spark a Change**, is designed to help you easily recruit, manage and communicate with your volunteers. You can:

- Register your organisation and create a profile
- Research and discuss what you're looking for
- Share volunteering opportunities
- Make contact with potential volunteers

Visit the website [www.sparkachange.org.uk](http://www.sparkachange.org.uk) or email [info@sparkachange.org.uk](mailto:info@sparkachange.org.uk)



"Volunteering has definitely improved my wellbeing and helped me keep a positive mindset during lockdown. It's given me something good to focus on and made me realise that I really am making a difference to so many people's lives!"

Megan Cave, Vaccination Volunteer

If you need help getting online, or would rather discuss your volunteering needs by phone, please do get in touch: **01458 550973**.

**NCVO** (The National Council for Voluntary Organisations) have published information giving practical ideas for working with volunteers aimed at anyone who recruits or manages them, including volunteers who manage other volunteers: [www.knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/coronavirus/volunteers](http://www.knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/coronavirus/volunteers)

And here is some guidance from the Government about helping safely: [www.gov.uk/coronavirus-volunteering](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-volunteering)

# Get outside



## Have you thought about your group meeting somewhere new?

In Somerset, we're blessed with some wonderful outdoor spaces and diverse countryside – most of it easily accessible and never far from where we live or work.

Why not consider running some of your community activities outside?

There are lots of outdoor spaces that are run for the benefit of their local communities – to support people who are struggling with their mental wellbeing and to educate children, young people and adults about the outside world including how to grow food, care for animals and conserve the environment.

It's also increasingly recognised that spending time outdoors or bringing nature into your everyday life will greatly benefit your wellbeing.

Doing things like growing food or flowers, exercising outdoors, watching birds and being around animals can have lots of positive effects including:

- Improving your mood and reducing feelings of stress or anger
- Helping you feel more relaxed
- Aiding better sleep
- Increasing your physical fitness levels
- Connecting you with other people

## Need some inspiration?

**Mind's** website has some great idea of things to try outdoors in nature: [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/ideas-to-try-in-nature](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/ideas-to-try-in-nature)

**Wilder Woods** projects are a small educational charity offering a variety of opportunities to all ages based at three sites, two in South Somerset and one in Mendip. Please visit [www.wilderwoods.org](https://www.wilderwoods.org) or email [ursula@wilderwoods.org](mailto:ursula@wilderwoods.org)

**ARK at Egwood** is a therapeutic land-based day facility, situated on the outskirts of Merriott in South Somerset. ARK supports people, of all ages with a variety of differing needs. Visit the website [www.arkategwood.com](https://www.arkategwood.com) or call **07974 658782**.

**Carymoor Environmental Centre** is a nature conservation and environmental education charity based just outside Castle Cary which runs regular volunteer days giving people a chance to get outside to connect with nature and to take part in a range of traditional conservation activities.

To find out more visit [www.carymoor.org.uk](https://www.carymoor.org.uk) e-mail [info@carymoor.org.uk](mailto:info@carymoor.org.uk) or call **01963 350143**.

The **Visit Somerset** website outlines all the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the county: [www.visitsomerset.co.uk](https://www.visitsomerset.co.uk) call **01749 835416** or email [info@visitsomerset.co.uk](mailto:info@visitsomerset.co.uk)

**Somerset Wildlife Trust** are a great source of information about wildlife reserves: [www.somersetwildlife.org/wildlife/nature-reserves](https://www.somersetwildlife.org/wildlife/nature-reserves) or call **01823 652400**.

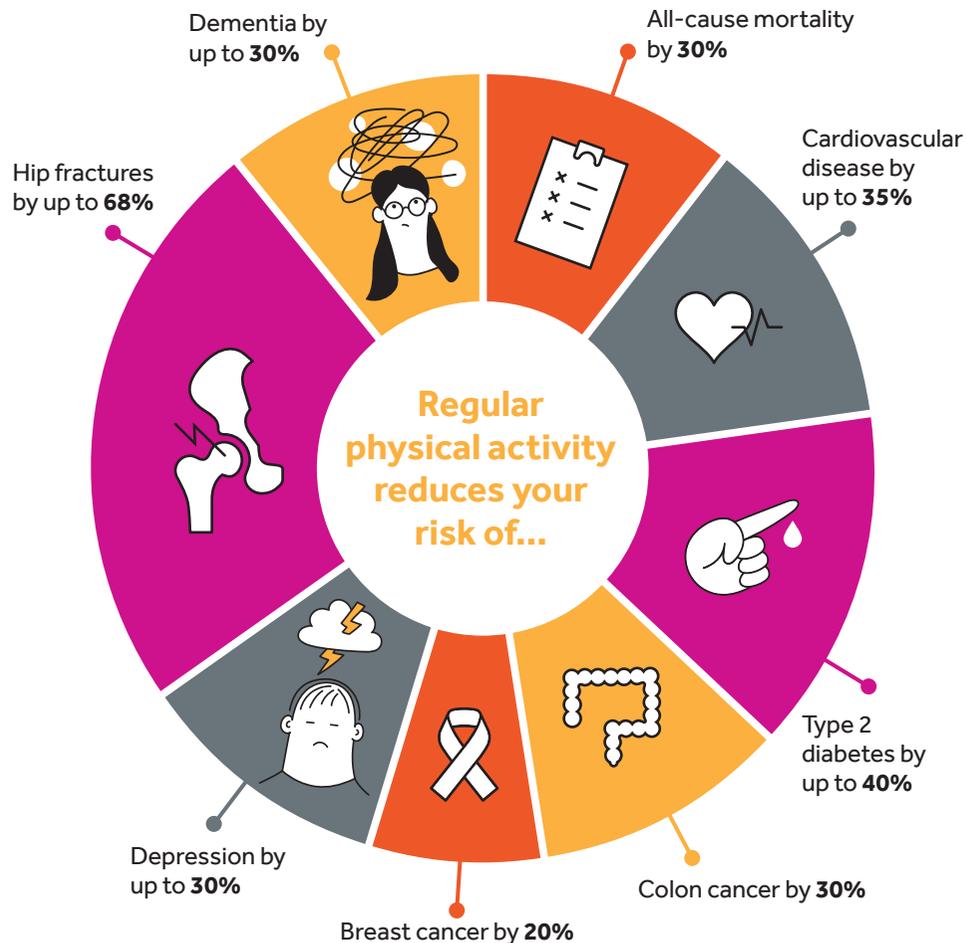
# Move more

Although some of us have continued to stay active during Covid, for many people the pandemic has made exercising a real challenge. Older and vulnerable individuals have been forced to shield at home, organised activities have been cancelled and facilities closed. But we all know that staying active is one of the best ways to take care of our physical and mental health.

As we emerge from lockdown, there are lots of ways that you can support participants in your community group to move more.

The **Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP)** have lots of information on their website [www.sasp.co.uk](http://www.sasp.co.uk) with guidance on different levels of fitness and how to get started.

## What are the health benefits of physical activity?



## Walk for health

There are many walking groups and regular Health Walks around the county where you can meet with others and have a guided walk led by a trained leader. These are a great opportunity to be outdoors, connecting with other people and making new friends.

To find out where your local health and walking groups are you can visit [www.sasp.co.uk/health-walks](http://www.sasp.co.uk/health-walks) or call **SASP** on **01823 653990**.

Sometimes, getting around in a wheelchair or pushing a buggy is hard work, especially if the terrain is uneven and bumpy. You can access information about accessible walking routes via the websites below. Each walking route has information and a description to help you get around.

[www.walkswithbuggies.com](http://www.walkswithbuggies.com)  
[www.walkswithwheelchairs.com](http://www.walkswithwheelchairs.com)



# Five steps to helping others

The current situation and uncertainty will lead to heightened levels of anxiety for many people, and potentially in the longer term to a range of mental health problems if people don't get the early support they need.



## Be aware

Watch for the warning signs that someone might be struggling. This is more challenging during the Covid-19 crisis, and we may need to be more pro-active.

## Build support

Explore what help they might need. Build a circle of support through family and friends. Explore how you can support them by phone or online.

## Ask

Trust your instincts and ask the person directly how they are doing. If necessary, ask twice. "Are you really OK?". If you feel they may be struggling let them know that you are worried about them and that you care.

## Listen

Give them time and space to talk and be helpfully nosy. Have a look at our listening tips on the following pages. During the Covid-19 crisis you may need to do more of this by telephone and online.

## Check in

Keep checking in and letting the person know you are there for them.

# Looking after yourself



**What you're doing to support your community is important, but it's also hard. Remember to look after yourself and others around you.**

As lockdown restrictions ease, you might find you're feeling a mixture of emotions. While there might be some things you're really looking forward to, there may be others that leave you feeling overwhelmed or anxious. It's completely understandable and normal to experience a mixture of highs and lows right now.

We should be prepared for the fact that the end of lockdown might be as hard for us as the start was. Just as it took us time to find ways of coping during lockdown,

we should also expect that it will take time to find our way back, and to reconnect with life. It's only by building up tolerance gently that we can move through these fears.

Don't force yourself to start again immediately – it's OK to need to take time to readjust.

If you, or someone you know, could benefit from additional support, **Open Mental Health**, an alliance of local voluntary organisations and the NHS have come together to provide 24/7 support to adults in Somerset.

Call 24/7 on **01823 276892** or email [support@openmentalhealth.org.uk](mailto:support@openmentalhealth.org.uk)

# Managing post-lockdown anxiety



## Go at your own pace

Recognising that you need to go at the right pace for you is important. You might feel nervous about getting out of your comfort zone again and navigating situations you haven't been in for a long time. The key is to recognise this and take things one step at a time.

## Speak to someone you trust

Try to accept that any worries, fears or concerns you have are valid and to be expected. Share how you're feeling with someone you feel comfortable talking to. The chances are they're experiencing similar feelings. Opening up about how you're feeling can help you both to feel supported and understood.



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## Build up tolerance

Try doing something that challenges you every day, or every few days. Don't beat yourself up if it doesn't go well but keep at it. Keep a note of things you've achieved, enjoyed or surprised yourself doing.



## Vary your routines

Try and vary your routines so that you see different people and encounter different situations. If one supermarket makes you nervous, try another. If a walk at one time of the day is very busy, try mixing walks at busy times with walks at quieter times.

Get in touch 01458 550973



## Look after your wellbeing

Taking care of your physical health can help you to cope with feelings of anxiety and stressful situations when they arise. Try to eat a healthy diet, limit alcohol, exercise regularly and get good-quality sleep. Even if life starts to get a little busier, remember to keep taking time out to look after yourself.

## Arm yourself with trustworthy information

Arming yourself with the correct facts will help you feel confident that you know what to do, and can help ease your worries. It's important to make sure the information and advice you're reading comes from sources that are up-to-date, trustworthy and evidence-based. Keep up-to-date with the latest guidance and local information on the Somerset County Council website [www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus)



## Plan ahead

Consider which situations you're feeling particularly anxious about and decide what you could do in this situation to help ease your concerns. For example, if you're anxious about taking public transport, can you find another way to travel or travel at a quieter time of day?



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## Focus on the positives

Try to focus on the present moment. Take pleasure from the little things you can enjoy again with each stage of restrictions easing. Maybe you're looking forward to playing outdoor sports again, dining al fresco or spending the lighter evenings in the garden catching up with a friend. You might find it helpful to keep a gratitude journal, where you write down what you're grateful for each day.

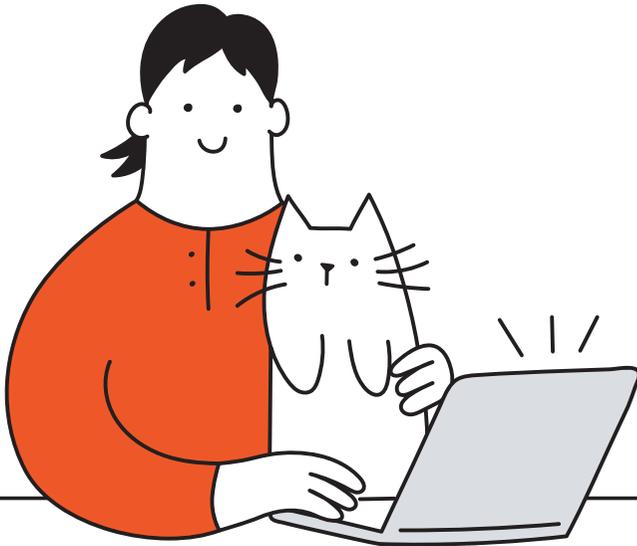


Get in touch 01458 550973

This booklet is brought to you by **Spark Somerset**, a charity who provide advice and support to the voluntary sector in Somerset. We also run the Volunteer Service, **Spark a Change**, inspiring people to get involved and make a difference in their communities.

If you, or others you are working with, could benefit from additional support then please get in touch and we can point you in the right direction.

We'd like to thank everyone who's taken part in this booklet including Denise Hiscox at Dinder Village Hall and:



## Connect with us

   @sparksomerset

This booklet was printed on recycled paper. We hope you find it useful. However, when you have finished with it, please recycle. Thank you!