The Mutual Aid Toolbox

Safeguarding Skills and Resources

If you are part of a COVID-19 mutual aid or community support group, this short guide will help you with your safeguarding needs.

It's based on conversations with a variety of mutual aid groups around the UK, who described their safeguarding experiences, needs, and practices.

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

In this section we have included some examples of good practice from the groups we interviewed. You may wish to include these practices in your own group's activities.

01 | Writing a Safeguarding Policy

One popular and effective method to educate volunteers on their safeguarding responsibilities is to create a written safeguarding policy which lays out clearly in different scenarios:

✓ **WHAT should be done**

✓ **WHEN it should be done**

✓ **WHO is responsible for doing it**

This written policy can then be used as part of the induction or training process for new volunteers, and also a referral source for all group members.

This is also useful as some official organisations that you work with may require a copy of your group's safeguarding policies as a condition of providing goods or services to your group (e.g., insurance providers, funding bodies).

Case study: If you don't know where to start, it can be helpful to base your policy on a "template" safeguarding policy:

> *"floating around somewhere on the drive was like a template safeguarding policy which every group could then take and adapt to make their own according to what their activities were."*
> *– Caitlin*

You may be able to obtain "model" policies from organisations such as the local authority, larger charities, or your Local Infrastructure Organisation. As one example, you can find model safeguarding policies here:
https://www.anncrafttrust.org/resources/safeguarding-adults-policy-procedures-templates/

02 | Focus on Training
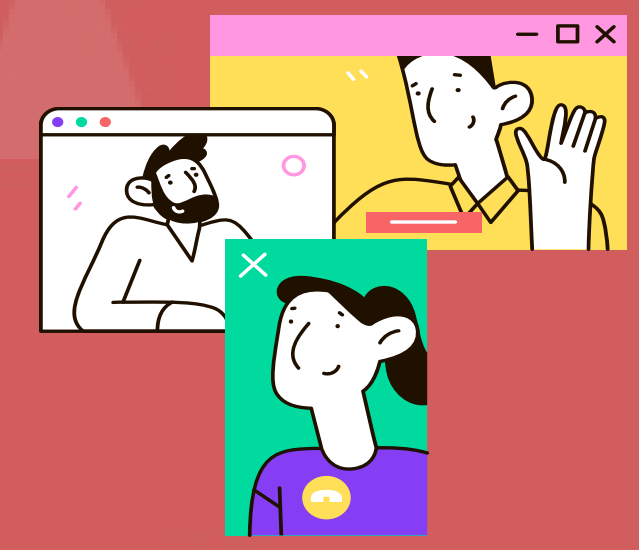
Groups reported that delivery of safeguarding training was an effective way to ensure that all of their group members or volunteers were up to date and on the same page when it came to safeguarding.

Case Study: Conveying information as quickly and accessibly as possible is essential for maintaining engagement. One team streamlined their training by incorporating it into a mandatory induction process:

" *For every team there's a training, so at the hall we go through stuff and part of that is talking about boundaries and who to raise things with if you have concerns and stuff like that. And on the phones similarly it's about our systems and how we report information and the kind of scripts we use. But also, how to manage difficult conversations, who to get in touch with, so yeah, I guess we kind of talk about some internal safeguarding things as well. – Violet*

Thinking creatively about formatting can also be part of this. One mutual aid group found that attendance at their Zoom training was low. In response they created a safeguarding graphic in the form of a flowchart which could be disseminated easily and simply.

Training can be delivered in two ways:

- live sessions (either in-person or online)
- Material which the volunteer accesses in their own time (e-learning, videos, or handbooks).

Live sessions can enhance engagement from those present, but they can be time-consuming to run.

On the other hand, material which can be accessed on the volunteer's own time is more flexible, but it can be difficult to ascertain the extent to which they have engaged with it.

Remember to Test!

Try to ensure that volunteers have gone through reference materials via tests or check-in conversations, especially if they are not taking part in other training.

03 | Safeguarding Specific Roles

In some groups, certain individuals had specific safeguarding-related responsibilities.

These individuals often had particular qualities which made them appropriate for this job, such as relevant experience (perhaps through employment), leadership ability, or more time to dedicate.
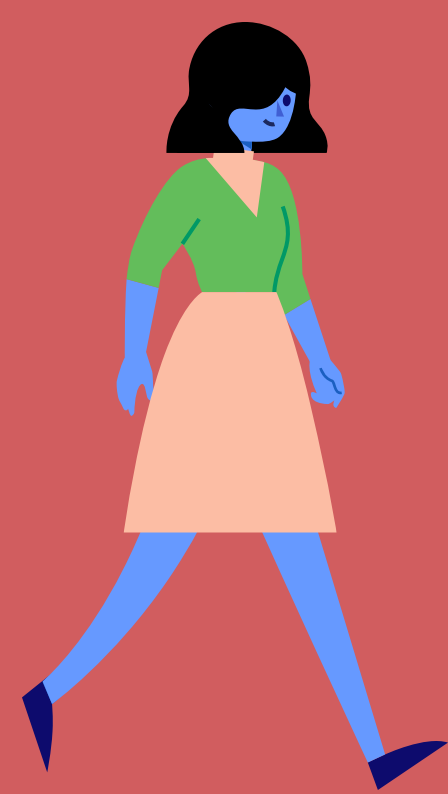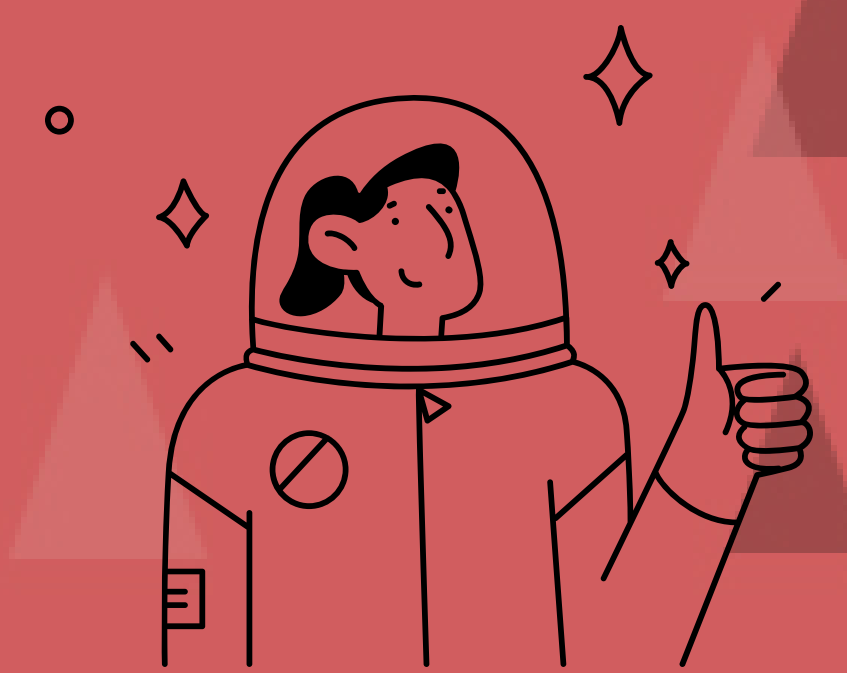
Examples of relevant professions:

Medical Professionals

Teachers

Social Workers

Case study: There are different ways to allocate safeguarding roles. One mutual aid group we interviewed formed a "committee" of experienced coordinators to discuss safeguarding cases. Another allocated potential safeguarding cases to group members with experience of dealing with similar scenarios (such as social workers). Another group installed a single safeguarding contact to provide specific support, and to whom concerns could be anonymously reported.

CHALLENGES WHEN SAFEGUARDING
And some solutions

In this section, we consider some common difficulties that arose for the groups we interviewed in the course of safeguarding - and suggest some solutions for each one.

01 | Volunteers Being Overextended

The Problem:

One common challenge faced by mutual aid groups is the potential for volunteers to overextend themselves when faced with safeguarding situations.

- This may be through trying to deal with the situation themselves;

- Or it could be through failing to set appropriate boundaries.

- This could lead to risk to volunteers themselves;

- It could also place the people being helped at risk, if volunteers inadvertently worsen the situation.

Solutions:

- Emphasise the importance to volunteers of not getting directly involved, but simply reporting through the proper channels.

- Having a clear and understood process to follow when difficult or potentially dangerous situations arise.

- Proper training around boundary-setting and understanding that safeguarding policies are there to protect both clients and volunteers.

- Putting in place volunteer coordinators to check-in with volunteers and assess welfare.

02 | Loss of Group Identity

The Problem:

Many mutual aid groups operate using principles or processes which are different from the "formal" charity sector. This provides a sense of group identity and freedom which appeals to many volunteers and makes mutual aid groups trusted in their community.

❌ For some groups, introducing "formal" measures such as official safeguarding policies can be viewed negatively.

❌ Working with official organisations such as local authorities can be seen as compromising the group's sense of identity.

Solutions:

✅ Involve group members in development of safeguarding policy

✅ Regular discussion around safeguarding issues with emphasis on why safeguarding is important

✅ Engage in open dialogue with partner organisations (such as Local Infrastructure Organisations) and come to arrangements which allow safeguarding to take place without compromising the group's autonomy or principles – e.g. anonymous reporting of concerns

03 | Maintaining Privacy

The Problem:

The safeguarding process requires sharing of information with other organisations such as the council or social services. But this often means that mutual aid groups need to collect lots of client data to make a referral. This creates two problems:

❌ First, it might compromise the client's privacy.

❌ Second, it creates a store of client data which needs to be protected properly in accordance with GDPR.

Solutions:

✅ Obtain support from Local Infrastructure Organisation, Ann Craft Trust, or Safeguarding Team within your local authority for further support/advice around data protection and confidentiality.

✅ Make clear during training that consent does not necessarily need to be obtained to raise a safeguarding referral and safeguarding concerns may override concerns for privacy.

✅ Disseminate guidance on information sharing around your team: eg https://www.scie.org.uk/safeguarding/adults/practice/sharing-information.

04 | Maintaining Positive Relationships with Clients

The Problem:

It can be difficult to maintain positive relationships with users of the service whilst also informing them of the need to share their information.

❌ It could be seen as "snooping" or reporting on them behind their back.

❌ In cases where volunteers already have personal relationships with clients (e.g., neighbour) and don't want to damage them, this can make them reluctant to report issues they observe.

Solutions:

✅ Training volunteers on how to have conversations with clients about safeguarding.

✅ Installing individuals with safeguarding roles within the organisation who can be reported to anonymously, can take responsibility for decisions, and are sufficiently detached personally from clients.
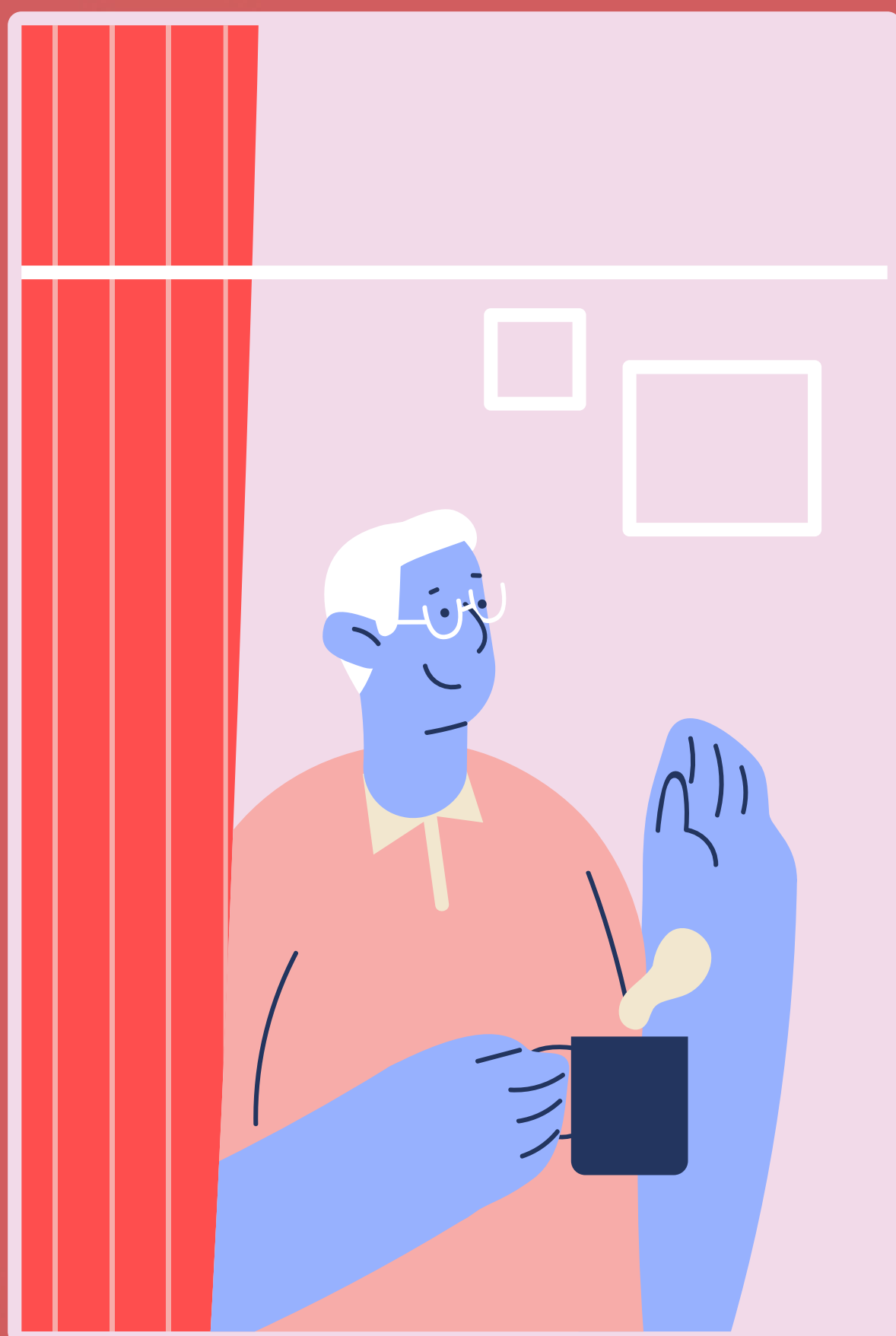
GETTING SUPPORT WITH SAFEGUARDING
FROM LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE ORGANISATIONS

In this section, we answer some common questions about Local Infrastructure Organisations, and outline how they can help with your group's safeguarding needs.

Q **WHAT IS A LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE ORGANISATION?**

A A Local Infrastructure Organisation (LIO) is a voluntary-sector organisation whose **main or only purpose** is to support other groups in their local voluntary, community, or social enterprise sector. Although some local community organisations such as churches, local authorities or councils may provide similar functions as LIOs, they are **not** considered LIOs, because they have another main purpose.

WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT CAN AN LIO PROVIDE WITH REGARD TO SAFEGUARDING? **Q**

A

LIOs can provide a variety of different types of support:

- ✅ Fundraising: either providing funding or helping groups to attract funding.
- ✅ Training: providing in-person training or educational materials such as videos or guidelines
- ✅ Advice and Consultation: help with case management, referrals to social services, quality assurance and oversight
- ✅ Networking: connections to other relevant groups in the area, such as potential collaborators or local authorities.

Case Study: One mutual aid group working with East Dunbartonshire Voluntary Action (EDVA) was able to obtain funding directly from EDVA in order to buy equipment for their operations. EDVA also provided a member of staff who joined the group's WhatsApp chat to provide continual support and assistance with any issues. EDVA also acted as a midpoint for safeguarding referrals: any members of the group who encountered a potential safeguarding scenario could discuss it with EDVA and EDVA could complete a referral on their behalf.

"

I think if any of our volunteers had gone and they pick up on something they'd immediately come and tell one of the admin, we have a discussion with someone at EDVA, and then if they think, "yeah, it should be taken forward," they might actually phone and speak to the person if they think it should be taken forward. And they'll speak to the various departments, social worker, whoever they think can support the person."
– Matt

Q

HOW CAN I FIND AND CONTACT MY LOCAL LIO?

A

The names of LIOs differ from place to place, but they often begin with "Voluntary Action", "Community Action", or "Council for Voluntary Service".

The national membership body for LIOs is the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA). You can find your local NAVCA member, with contact details, here: https://navca.org.uk/find-a-member-1

DO YOU NEED TO FULFIL CERTAIN CONDITIONS IN ORDER TO PARTNER WITH LIOS?

Q

Official partnerships with LIOs often require the implementation of some formal structures and policies: this may include financial information, staffing structures, and organisational policies.

A

It is worth reaching out to LIOs to have an open conversation: even groups who are not interested in an official membership should be able to access at least some resources and support.

RESOURCES

NAVCA's Safeguarding page: https://navca.org.uk/safeguarding

Ann Craft Trust website: https://www.anncrafttrust.org/

NCVO Safeguarding Resources: https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/information/safeguarding

Safeguarding Training: https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding/checklists-training-and-other-support/training

https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/training

https://www.scie.org.uk/training/safeguarding/

Find your local Adults Safeguarding Board: https://www.anncrafttrust.org/resources/find-your-nearest-safeguarding-adults-board/

Report a Child Safeguarding concern to your Local Council: https://www.gov.uk/report-child-abuse-to-local-council

Domestic Abuse helpline (Refuge): https://www.refuge.org.uk/get-help-now/phone-the-helpline/

Find your local NAVCA member (Local Infrastructure Organisation): https://navca.org.uk/find-a-member-1

Mutual Aid Networks:
https://www.mutual-aid.co.uk/
https://ukmutualaid.group/
https://covidmutualaid.org/

WHO WE ARE

This Mutual Aid Toolbox was co-produced by the Groups & Covid research group at University of Sussex and the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action.

Previous editions of the Mutual Aid Toolbox can be found here.