

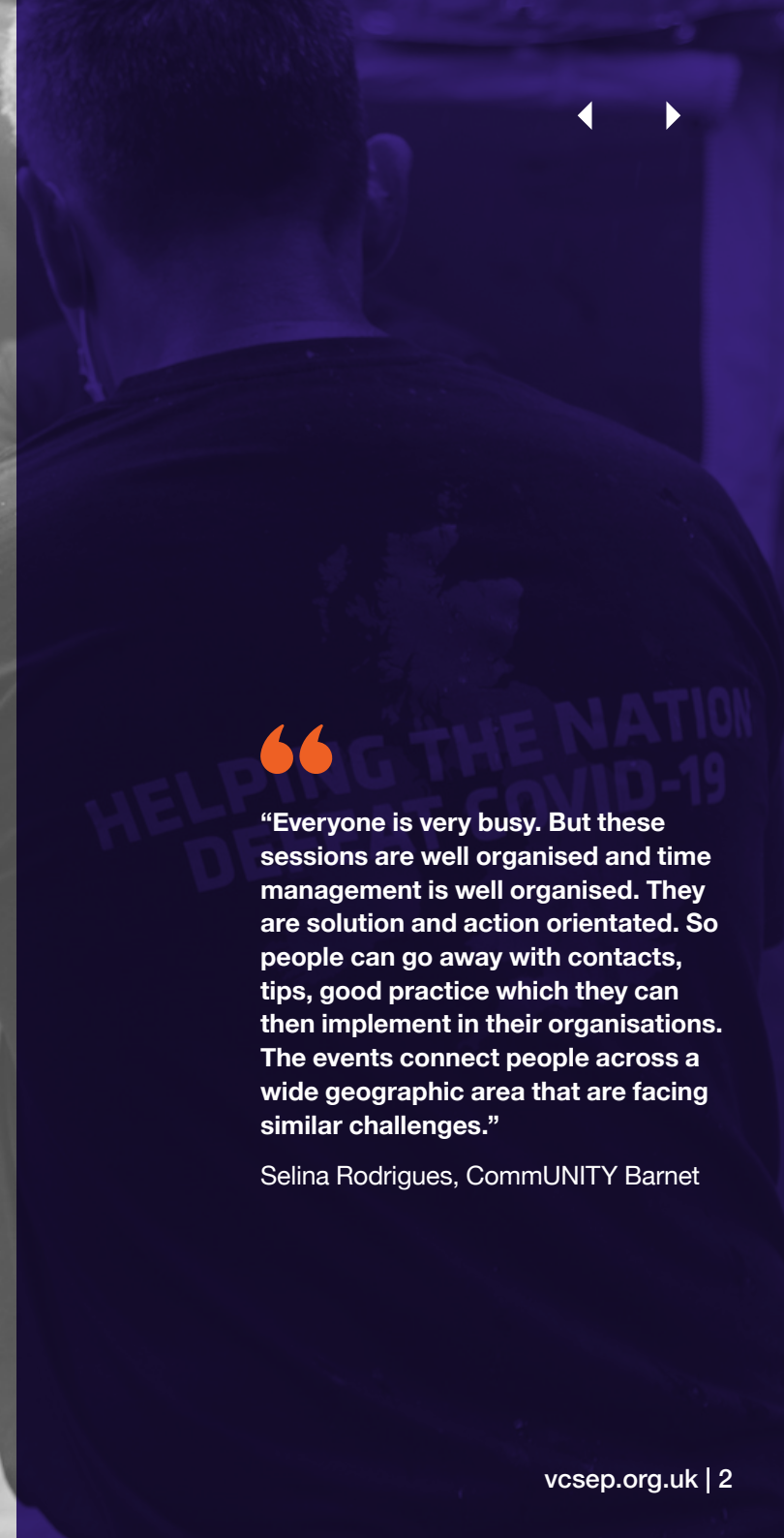


# Evolution: The Emergencies Partnership beyond the pandemic

2021/22 Impact Report



Image courtesy of RE:ACT



“Everyone is very busy. But these sessions are well organised and time management is well organised. They are solution and action orientated. So people can go away with contacts, tips, good practice which they can then implement in their organisations. The events connect people across a wide geographic area that are facing similar challenges.”

Selina Rodrigues, CommUNITY Barnet

# A word from our Co-chairs

**The last financial year represents another extraordinary year for us all, personally and across the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). Together we have tackled a number of challenges head-on, and the Emergencies Partnership has continued to evolve as our partners have risen to each significant event.**

From adapting and responding to the immediate and longer-term challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, to helping the Home Office with the surge of arrivals from Afghanistan, UK storms affecting the vulnerable and supporting the Government in their response to the people arriving from Ukraine due to the invasion - the sector has shown itself to be a corner stone of resilience building. Together, we continue to demonstrate how forming trusted connections, sharing insight and knowledge, and developing capability together is beneficial in any crisis or emergency.

Over the last year the Emergencies Partnership has continued to gather momentum, with the number of active partners around the table growing further. We gained greater trust from Government and are becoming a recognised route for information sharing, for Government to hear from, and collaborate with the sector as we all look to improve our preparedness for whatever major shock should come next.

We can also see how the connections made during the pandemic are now benefitting communities for other emergencies. During storms Dudley, Eunice and Franklin, there were great examples of community action as relationships made during the pandemic, were drawn on for support in a new challenge.

This year we used the collective voice of the partnership to contribute to the review of the National Resilience Strategy and Civil Contingencies Act. The great collaborative work of our partners, and the supporting partnership team, was used as evidence and insight. We made the case for how and why the sector forms an essential part of a collaborative and collective cross-system response to planning and responding to emergencies and should be recognised as such.

As we look to the year ahead there is still a mountain to climb in how our partnership works to achieve our aims. Systemic change takes time and gaining the recognition of the sector’s role in resilience – and ensuring that we can deliver on that role in a more joined up way with people at its heart - won’t happen overnight. But, in the extraordinary period we have all lived and worked through recently, we are making huge strides in the right direction. We are looking forward to what we can achieve together in the next phase of our evolution.



**Maddy Desforges OBE**

CEO National Association for Voluntary and Community Action and Co-chair of the Emergencies Partnership



**Mike Adamson CBE**

CEO British Red Cross and Co-chair of the Emergencies Partnership

# Thank you from our Director



**Although COVID-19 remained the dominant focus of the Emergencies Partnership 12 months ago, over the past year, we have also begun to create a space for the Partnership beyond the pandemic, establishing our role in a broader range of emergencies. We have started to implement some of the learning from the last two years, as we understand more about what makes the most difference for our partners and the people, we all seek to support.**

The Emergencies Partnership has continued to bring together local community-based organisations and specialist partners, allowing skills, knowledge and insight to be shared. The contributions from partners around the country are invaluable, they are each experts in the needs of their communities.

We are incredibly grateful to have such wonderful partners who so often go the extra mile to connect and learn from each other, as well as respond to requests for support. Many have also been willing to try something different when faced with new, emerging situations, and with great success. On the other hand, they have also backtracked with us in the instances when things have not worked so well. Sometimes, that's been where we've learned the most.

We have tackled a series of major emergencies together from hyper-local, to regional, national and global, and are now seeing that the spirit of volunteering and continuing legacy of community activism within the general public is a staple in our communities, post-pandemic.

Thank you to all those organisations who remain committed to working in partnership for the benefit of those at risk of and impacted by major shocks. I am continuously humbled by the strength of the sector pulling together and your continued commitment to how we do this in the best possible way.

Thank you also, to our funders – for continuing to enable us to strive for the change we want, to champion improved partnership with Government and open doors for how we can do that even more effectively in the year ahead.



**Robyn Knox**  
Director



Image courtesy of Fareshare/RE:ACT

## About us

We are over 200 community and specialist organisations committed to working together in preparation for and response to major emergencies in the UK.

Our network of organisations is committed to a more person-centred approach to emergency planning and response.

By working better together, we aim to reduce the confusion and further trauma caused to individuals and communities by disconnected responses to emergencies.

We exist to unlock the power of this partnership before, during and after an emergency by making the best use of our shared time and resources and bringing the voices of the local and national civil society organisations to the forefront for the development of greater national resilience.



Image courtesy of Shaun Flannery/British Red Cross

# Our partnership's response record at a glance...

In each of the responses we have consistently provided our core support in the form of:

- Connecting existing and new partners who step up to respond, including major response partners and communities for act for themselves.
- Sharing situational awareness updates.
- Sharing real-time information, enabling and encouraging ongoing communication.

With each emergency, there are unique requirements and evolutions of our partnership, which we've summarised.



Image courtesy of Fareshare

## 2018

### Partnership formed

- lessons from Grenfell fire and the, Manchester and London terror attacks brought 15 voluntary partners together.

## 2019

### Whaley Bridge Dam flood

## 2020

### Partnership funded

- partnership established as a funded and growing mechanism for sector coordination in emergencies, building connections, sharing data and insight, coordinating voluntary action and growing significantly to 250 partner organisation.

### COVID-19

### Stranded HGV drivers

## 2021

### COVID-19 continues with mass testing and vaccinations

### Storm Christoph

### Afghan arrivals

### Storm Arwen

**Partnership evolves** – we began to see the value of the partnership beyond the COVID-19 response, helping in capability building, community connections particularly with those disproportionately impacted, turning lessons into action and supporting in a broader range of major emergencies.

## 2021

### Storms Eunice and Franklin

### COVID-19 continues (Omicron)

### Russia Ukraine War outbreak.



Image courtesy of UK Community Foundations



“Deep dives into relevant topics, and the time for discussion/Q&A means we can learn from the depth of knowledge within the network and hear about these ideas being applied in different contexts (e.g. borough-level, county-level, region-level).”

Katie Higginson, Community Impact Bucks

# Our Strategy

Our vision is for a person-centred, co-ordinated response for those impacted by an emergency.

## We Believe

No one organisation can take responsibility for emergency response, but that by coming together to share voices, knowledge and resources across the voluntary and community, private and public sectors, we will develop greater community and national resilience.

## Our Mission

A mobilising force, bringing organisations across the voluntary and community sector together, with our partners in local and national Government, to deliver a more coordinated and person-centred response to emergencies.

We believe we can achieve our mission through three focus areas:



### Sharing insight

to inform the action we take and support delivery of a human-centred approach before, during and after emergencies

We work closely with partners to share actionable insight about threats to our communities and needs of the people (potentially) affected. We learn from and co-create our activity so that it remains relevant and continues to add value to emergency preparedness, response and recovery.



### Making trusted connections

to ensure we are better connected and prepared across the sector for when an emergency strikes

We support our partners to build understanding and trust in each other so that when an emergency strikes they have the connections and information they need to work together more effectively.

We amplify the voice of those who are less heard during an emergency, highlight and escalate key issues from across the sector to government.



### Building capability

to create the space that brings together best practices, previous learning, new skills and shared ways of working

We bring partners together to learn from previous emergency response activity, share or develop skills on key emergency issues and prepare together for any future threats.

We improve the way statutory bodies and the voluntary and community sector work together in preparing for and responding to emergencies in the UK.

## Although every emergency is different, our work must:

- Focus on those disproportionately impacted by emergencies,
- Note the types and frequency of emergencies we're seeing,
- Learn from every emergency we respond to, and
- Design future responses alongside the communities affected.

## Support and Sustainability

- We continue to fundraise to ensure we can continue our critical work,
- We seek supporters who align with our values, believe in what we do and want to help shape emergency planning for the sector with us,
- We are committed to great communication - keeping our existing and potential partners informed and engaged in the work of the partnership.



# Emergency Response

The Impact of our Partnership in 2021/22

Image courtesy of Fareshare



# Responding to the surge in arrivals from Afghanistan

**In August 2021, the political situation in Afghanistan necessitated rapid evacuation of thousands of people from the capital city of Kabul. The UK government airlifted over 15,000 people out of the country before the end of the month, including both British and Afghan nationals. Most were forced to leave their belongings behind, arriving in the UK with very little.**

The Emergencies Partnership (EP) was contacted by the Home Office and the Department of Health and Social Care to help with getting vital aid such as food, clothing, baby supplies, toiletries and medicines on an urgent basis as the evacuees were arriving at various airports around the UK. Many of our partners responded across the country, providing specialist emergency support, as well as championing and supporting the integration of the Afghan families into communities.

## Spotlight on our impact in London

Over the August bank holiday weekend, working with London Plus, one of our local partners in London, the Emergencies Partnership began to put calls out to our extended networks to find out who would be able to help with these numerous and urgent requests. A number of London-based organisations including RE:ACT, British Red Cross, Team London, the Lewisham Donation Hub and Little Village came forward as a result of that call. Together, we surveyed the situation, explored the existing network and introduced new organisations to each other and the partnership, enabling rapid and efficient ways to work together to respond.

## What we did

While the Government department had been working on getting initial needs assessment forms filled in by the arrivals, the EP, now made up of veteran and new organisations designed a four-step process to make sure civil society organisations were able to work effectively together and deliver a human-centred response to this crisis.

With different partners taking on different steps and handing off between each other.

## The process involved:

- Step 1: Sourcing donations
- Step 2: Sorting donations
- Step 3: Collection and delivery to the quarantine hotels
- Step 4: Distribution at the hotels



Image courtesy of RE:ACT



**“Those early conversations were so reassuring, particularly with the central team, there was a real confidence, particularly when we were having evacuation flights coming in at the weekend and we were standing up hotels on a Friday knowing there were going to be evacuees landing on Saturday.**

**I didn't have anyone to go into those hotels to welcome people and the local authorities hadn't yet been stood up. I reached out on Saturday morning and they were out that afternoon – that was incredibly valuable that there was someone offering a helping hand to these evacuees straight out of Afghanistan into a hotel.”**

National Government representative

# Responding to the surge in arrivals from Afghanistan

## The impact of our partnership

By Saturday afternoon the first list of identified needs was shared with the Emergencies Partnership to support 5000 evacuees across 40 hotels in the greater London area. Lewisham Donation Hub, one of the newer partners took up the first two steps in the process and Little Village offered to take care of the needs of everyone under the age of five in the hotels. RE:ACT and Team London organised themselves to take care of Step 3 of the process. After the first intense weekend, the partner organisations worked together to develop a recurring process with hotel managers and Government liaison officers within each hotel to enable step 3 and 4 of the process based on the various needs as they came in.

**Within the first 48 hours of the emergency response being underway almost 100 per cent of needs from the first set of requests had been met by the Emergencies Partnership.**



### Afghan Families

- The people impacted got immediate and most pressing needs met in the first hours and days of arriving in UK.
- Donated goods that weren't needed were turned into cash donations for Afghan families and prevented from going to the landfill.



### Government

- The Government had a mechanism for engaging the sector on a national scale to support with the challenge.



### Partners:

- VCS organisations were able to act with confidence and clarity given shared awareness of the situation.
- VCS organisations struck up partnerships for delivery and ways of working that have continued to serve the communities.



Image courtesy of RE:ACT



“Our response to a major terror incident would probably be smoother this time due to the Partnership. Because the Partnership would know where to stand back as opposed to where to mobilise, whereas in the past everyone would have tried to mobilise, so I can definitely see value in that increased awareness of each other and our boundaries and our overlaps. I’m getting to see some of the smaller charities at the national level that I would have never even known about”.

National emergency response organisation

Image courtesy of RE:ACT

# Adapting and responding to the COVID-19: Omicron variant

**In November 2021, the first cases of the new Omicron variant of COVID-19 emerged in the UK. It soon proved to be more transmissible than previous variants, quickly becoming the dominant strain of the virus. With positive COVID-19 cases rising, there was an increased demand for volunteers to assist with PCR testing and to help at vaccination centres.**

The general public were also encouraged to receive their booster vaccines by the end of the year to slow the spread of Omicron, for which the voluntary and community sector was called upon to support. Omicron came at a point when the Emergencies Partnership had already done considerable work in this space as a central team. Many connections had already been made between VCS organisations in the earlier stages of the pandemic, and with the uptake in cases, many testing and/or vaccination sites were stood back up with existing volunteer relationships.

## What we did

- The EP (Emergencies Partnership) team created multiple rapid opportunities to bring partners together to understand the evolving situation by hosting national network calls, regional touch points and specific calls with community infrastructure groups. The team were able to share and send our intelligence proactively.
- Partners redoubled their efforts for the booster based on learnings from earlier vaccinations

- The EP team revisited practices established with Government departments, including the Department for Education on the return to school and put into action things that had worked well and learnings from what had not gone so well.
- The Insights team pulled together data relating to Omicron that was published via our bulletin and sent out to partners.

## The impact of our partnership

- Existing connections and relationships between partners helped to establish action on the ground rapidly. For example, many testing and/or vaccination sites were stood back up with existing volunteer relationships. Connections that had been made with faith-based or volunteer groups were re-established, and volunteers were quickly re-engaged to help with the booster doses.
- Schools and colleagues were able to lean on existing relationships made in the first round of COVID-19.
- We were able to activate a faster more streamlined response.



Image courtesy of Max Miechowski/British Red Cross



**“We only had individual relationships beforehand, then we started engaging with the Partnership as a whole, which was really helpful, and we did things differently, got funding out to different organisations, and were able to put volunteers into environments that other volunteers might not want to go in – that wouldn’t have happened without the Partnership.”**

National Government agency

# Responding to major storms in early 2022

**In February 2022, the UK was battered by storms Dudley, Eunice and Franklin in the space of one week. Storm Eunice had the largest impact, with two rare red weather warnings being issued, wind speed records being broken and over one million homes being left without power.**

Storm Dudley occurred prior to Eunice, mainly affecting power supply in areas in the North of England, with Storm Franklin arriving post-Eunice, bringing strong winds that caused challenges during the clean-up operation following the two previous storms. The voluntary and community sector was on-hand to support wherever needed such as with evacuations and supplying hot food and water.

## What we did

- Partners self-mobilised, making connections and delivering support to communities across the country. For example, RE:ACT was immediately on the ground providing assistance.
- We were able to use multiple sources of data that helped us locate and focus on vulnerable communities and were able to get Local Resilience Forums (LRF) connected with Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations who worked with vulnerable communities.

- Across the country, the VCS worked with statutory partners and utility companies to understand where and how to focus on the most vulnerable. For example, around the country but in the South West, in particular, partners were engaged closely with utility companies and specifically focused on vulnerable groups – targeting support to those who most needed it and those with least capacity to cope.
- The Insights and Communications team worked on preparing a one-stop resource centre for Winter Preparedness – becoming a trusted source of information.
- VCS organisations responded to formal calls from LRFs to provide support.

## The impact of our partnership

The self-activation by partner organisations showed that relationships made and strengthened due to COVID-19 were then exercised again in the context of a different emergency.



Image courtesy of British Red Cross



**“The [Emergencies] Partnership representative I’ve got is great and working together we’ve got a consolidated group of voluntary sector individuals far beyond the normal which has opened things up much more for us in understanding...we’ve managed to pull in groups that wouldn’t normally have thought they would be involved in supporting us during an incident. So, we can stand up and everyone knows what they have to do and how it works.”**

Local Resilience Forum Statutory Lead

Image courtesy of Sam Atkins/British Red Cross



## Preparedness

Preparedness is a key part of what the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership does and encourages. The better prepared our partners and communities are before an emergency hits, the more coordinated and effective the response. This year, we have been working to increase emergency preparedness in a variety of ways and ahead of a range of potential crises looking forward.

Image courtesy of Max Miechowski/British Red Cross

# Understanding the challenge and impact of surplus Donated Goods

**Whenever an emergency strikes, the British public are always keen to help those in need, generously donating clothing, books, food and toys.**



Image courtesy of Fareshare/RE:ACT

However, this often leads to collection centres being overwhelmed with donated goods, many of which are not suitable or are inappropriate for those they are intended for, with usable items ending up in landfill. The Emergencies Partnership was notified of this growing problem during the Afghan evacuation in 2021, and so decided to conduct a pilot with RE:ACT to attempt to deal with the challenges of what to do with surplus goods and how to manage them effectively and efficiently. It also aimed to understand what the sector, local and national Government can do to ensure that this issue doesn't continue to happen in future.

The Donated Good Pilot involved one central distribution hub being established in a 5000m<sup>2</sup> Amazon warehouse in Leicester. Donations at local collection points were moved to a collection centre, before being transported to the warehouse. Once they had arrived, donations were sorted into five categories:

- **New**
- **Fit for purpose**
- **Not suitable**
- **Poor quality**
- **Hazardous**

Those that were new or fit for purpose were inventoried and made available to be distributed, goods that were deemed not suitable were either sold or recycled, with those that were poor quality or hazardous, recycled by the Salvation Army.

It is estimated that at least 2500 people benefitted from the Donated Goods Pilot, with over nine tonnes of donations being redistributed to evacuees from Afghanistan as well as part of humanitarian missions to Ukraine and Gambia. Smaller donations were also made to local causes such as sanitary products to a women's refuge, and tinned food and dried goods to a homeless shelter.



The goods remaining at the end of the three-month pilot were recycled by weight, earning £8496.72. Some items were also sold to Amazon staff onsite, raising just under £1000, however had this stock been recycled, less than a tenth of this income would have been realised based on recycling by weight financials. Money made from this was donated to Afghan appeals to continue supporting those affected by the situation in Afghanistan. Although the immediate impact of this was that more money was raised to be spent on items that were needed, the true value of these goods was not realised and therefore less money than what could've been raised reached those who had to flee their homes.

The issue of surplus donated goods is a reoccurring one with the same challenges arising whenever there is a major emergency, therefore we need to proactively identify what steps can be taken to prevent this. United messaging around 'donating cash, not goods' from the Government, voluntary and community sector, and local and national media could encourage the wider public to think before they donate. However, this is a longer-term solution and so with surplus goods likely to continue, funding is needed for schemes such as the Donated Goods Pilot to ensure appropriate items reach those in need and reduce the amount that goes to landfill due to the poor quality of the goods or when the need is no longer there.

# Rapid preparedness and response to the impact of the war in Ukraine in the UK



**In February 2022, Russian troops entered Ukraine. In the days and weeks that followed, it became clear that Europe was facing a refugee crisis not seen since the Second World War.**

This became one of the main focuses for the EP team as we started thinking about what the voluntary and community sector's role could be in responding to the rapidly changing situation. Many of our partners also began preparedness planning as we saw huge numbers of people fleeing Ukraine, with thousands of refugees expected to arrive in the UK.

Having learnt from previous experiences such as the Afghanistan evacuation in August 2021, the Emergencies Partnership was quick to bring together new and existing partners in Ukraine-specific regional touchpoint meetings and Extraordinary Emergencies Partnership Network Calls. It was noted during the reflections on the Afghan response that making trusted connections with organisations who had expertise specific to the emergency, was a huge benefit. Therefore, those such as the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (AUGB) and HealthProm joined our Network Calls to share their knowledge.



Image courtesy of British Red Cross

## What we/our partners did

- Partner conversations, scenario planning and connections were made across the partnership.
- Increased connections with the Local Government Associations, Home Office and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to seek clarity and inform on how the Homes for Ukrainians scheme needs to work in practice
- Four extraordinary national network calls and regional touch points were organised to look at expected need and develop preparedness plans in the partnership.
- Strengthened the sector's capability to respond by sharing lessons, good and bad practice from the equivalent surges in Afghan and Syrian arrivals previously.
- The Insights team collated knowledge and insights from the sector and shared a capability matrix with links to almost 80 organisations detailing proposed offers of support.
- Dedicated page on the VCSEP website providing a centralised collection of over 50 resources that may be useful for partners.
- The use of Slack as a live communication channel gained momentum as partners are seeking support and work in collaboration.

# Rapid preparedness and response to the impact of the war in Ukraine in the UK

## Strategic Impact

- The Government departments were able to adjust their response and human-centred approach because of their direct link to the sector through the Emergencies Partnership.
- The central team's collation of the concerns from across the partnership, meant that the Government departments were able to review and respond quickly.
- As a result of the weekly Ukraine-focused network calls, partners had access to more accurate information than anywhere else, which helped them deepen relationships with the local authority.
- Local resilience networks through local authorities were strengthened.
- We created links for partners who were support lines such as the British Red Cross, Bernardo's, Citizens Advice, who, as a result were able to offer coordinated support.

## Sector Impact

Our partners were quick to react to the unfolding events, wanting to support those affected in any way they could, particularly once the Homes for Ukraine scheme was established. During the Ukraine crisis, our partners' actions included:

- One Westminster contacted volunteers who spoke Russian and/or Ukrainian to find out whether they may be available to act as interpreters.

- They also identified an organisation that could undertake assessments of households in Westminster and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, who offered their homes to refugees.
- Baby Basics worked with the Sanctuary Foundation to support sponsors with practical equipment for 0–5-year-olds. They also launched a campaign for donations to support and had over 3600 items donated in less than two days.
- Mind launched an emergency fund for local Minds (across England and Wales) to provide mental health support to Ukrainians arriving in the UK.
- CVS Brent partnered with their local authority to ensure they were not duplicating work, and to see what could be done to add value, fill gaps in services and be clear about roles and responsibilities.
- Community Action IOW worked closely with their local authority to provide wrap-around care. They also had Ukrainian speakers to support those overseas who wanted to come to the Isle of Wight.
- Voluntary Support North Surrey offered to help with befriending and translation for Ukrainian refugees arriving in Surrey.



Image courtesy of British Red Cross



**“Our local LRF has started to see the benefit of the [Emergencies] Partnership. This is where the Partnership really helps because we're able to hear it from the horse's mouth, DCMS or DLUHC, what's going on, and able to share that locally and wider across the Partnership.”**

Local VCS organisation



# Building Capability and skills across the sector

In 2021, the VCS Emergencies Partnership introduced quarterly **Capability and Skills Sharing opportunities designed to strengthen the emergency preparedness, response and recovery skills of all partners.**

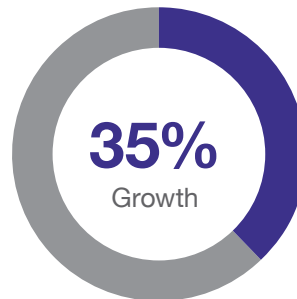
The focus on building capability developed following the successful delivery of two scenario-based exercises during the COVID-19 response, where partners commended the opportunity to work through a structured scenario and build their collective understanding of who can support where.

We aim to create the space to bring partners together to share best practice, review lessons and previous learning and acquire new skills and shared ways of working.



## What we did

To date there have been five sessions delivered including three scenario-based Tabletop Exercises (TTX) based around a flooding, a terrorist attack and a heatwave emergency. We have collaborated with a range of subject expert partners in the delivery of these events, with guest facilitators from Communities Prepared, RE:ACT, Third Sector Group, Eastleigh Borough Council and the Churchill Fellowship and two skills exchange workshops based on flooding preparedness and spontaneous volunteer management



**“Thanks for all the coordination - this is one of the most valuable ‘bodies’ we are part of. The volume and value of networking and support provided is excellent.”**

Rebecca Wilson, Little Village

## The impact:

Our scenario sessions have brought awareness to particular types of emergencies but to also build partner’s understanding of the strengths and capabilities of each other to support the principle of fostering connections and partner’s ‘making friends before you need them’.

The sessions have engaged a broad audience from across the sector, specialist and generalist organisations, local authority, NHS and blue light services. Feedback from these exercises has been strong, with recognition that they bring much added value to the sector with 96% of participants rating them well-structured, 86% reported feeling better prepared and 94% keen to engage in similar exercises again.<sup>1</sup>

There has been a 35% growth in the number of partner’s joining these sessions, with the spontaneous volunteer management session receiving 95% satisfaction rating and 100% of partner’s stating they would recommend the partnership to sector colleagues. Melvin Hartley, Resilience Manager at Eastleigh Borough Council and keynote speaker for this session, said that days after delivery he was approached by numerous organisations, from both the voluntary sector and statutory bodies who had been in attendance, keen to further develop their connections and remove barriers to the sector being engaged in emergency response planning.

# Informing the National Resilience Strategy and Civil Contingencies Act

**For our society to be as resilient as possible, it is essential we build an approach which harnesses the power and expertise of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). The 2021/2022 review of the National Resilience Strategy (NRS) and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA) represented an opportunity to transform the way we think about our collective responsibility and role in building and maintaining resilient communities.**

The Emergencies Partnership's submission for the review of the strategy was set in evidence and insight and generated by a cross section of representatives of the Partnership. It described the changes that partners want to see and considered the role of the Emergencies Partnership in improving societal resilience and illustrated how the VCS could form an integral part of a cross system response. The knowledge and experience of the sector is invaluable when collaborating with national Government, local authorities, local authority hubs and local resilience structures to provide a holistic, sector wide and inclusive approach to planning and responding to emergencies and maintaining resilient communities.

On behalf of partners, as one united voice, the submission called for the following action to deliver system-wide change, to ensure inclusion and integration of the voluntary and community sector in our collective approach:

- Emergency and community focused VCS involvement should be mandated in National Strategy and Guidance, specifically in the planning of, training for and responding to major emergencies at every level of the local resilience structures.
- The local resilience structures should be supported to meaningfully foster engagement and capability building with and amongst the VCS.
- The VCS should be recognised and adequately resourced as a network of effective and connected resilience building assets.
- The VCS Emergencies Partnership and representative partners should be engaged in ongoing discussions following this submission on how to practically enable these changes to happen and how they sit within wider reform.

Some LRFs have appreciated the direct flow of information from central Government channelled rapidly by the Partnership, evidenced by the increase in LRF direct engagement in Partnership activities such as network calls, capability building events and regional touchpoints.



**“It’s made a massive difference to us, 100%. So, when any big question that the Government is asking whether that’s ‘have we got enough vaccine volunteers?’ or ‘how are we going to engage the voluntary sector on any particular emergency response?’, it’s immensely valuable to have somebody we can go to and talk to and who can convene others who are keen to be involved. Especially, whenever there’s a crisis you get outpourings of support – having a place as Government (which is a very blunt instrument) which can do that join up between the very national level priorities and the local is hugely helpful.”**

National Government representative

# Our Final Reflections

The past year has seen the Emergencies Partnership continue to grow and learn as a collective. We feel an immense amount of pride when reflecting on this evolution and knowing that our work together is starting to have an impact.

## Learning lessons

As the Emergencies Partnership, we look to prepare for, respond to and learn from emergencies. The latter is incredibly important as only from reflecting on our actions, can we ensure future responses are even more effective and human centred than the last.

- **Making connections:** Connecting with organisations who represent a range of communities has been extremely useful and added significant value. This was a lesson following the Afghan evacuation that we have carried forward. However, there are many diverse communities that we, as a sector and Partnership, need to engage with better.
- **Role of the VCS:** Establishing the VCS's role within preparedness and response has been challenging and led to partners feeling they were being under-utilised. Ensuring we continue to promote the work of the sector and build further trust with local and national Government will strengthen awareness and understanding of the capabilities of the VCS.

- **Addressing needs assessments:** When an emergency hits, the needs of those affected can vary, therefore the sector, along with Local Resilience Forums and local and national Government representatives, must ensure that there is a consistent method for carrying out needs assessments and a recognised pathway to escalate when requirements cannot be fulfilled.
- **Surplus donated goods:** Partners saw large volumes of physical donations following the arrival of refugees from both Afghanistan and Ukraine. However, the majority did not have the resources required to store and sort donations, items did not always meet needs, and donations were often poor quality. Consistent messaging is needed to encourage the donation of cash or time rather than physical items.
- **Funding for the sector:** Access to rapid funding during an emergency is essential, for emergency response organisations and for local infrastructure and community organisations who are working in their communities to provide essential longer-term support, along with that needed in an emergency. This needs to be addressed to ensure these vital organisations are sustainable.

## 2022/23...

For the coming year we have three primary areas of focus. We want to continue build skills and capability that really makes a difference; we want to strengthen connections between VCS and Local Resilience Forums, and we want to ensure disproportionately impacted and underserved groups are represented in emergency preparedness and planning.

## Thank you

Our partners' commitment to collaboration and working together to represent the needs of those worst impacted during an emergency is what makes the Emergencies Partnership so strong, and we thank them for their continued support.

The support from our funders also allows us to continue encouraging change that will create a society of resilient and prepared communities. We thank all those involved in the Emergencies Partnership.

Image courtesy of RE:ACT