

# COVID RESPONSE

HOW RUMOURLESS CITIES NETWORK HAVE BEEN RESPONDING TO THE EMERGENCY- AT BOTH A LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL AND WITHIN COMMUNITIES

MESSAGE FROM  
THE LEADERS

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**NEWSLETTER N.5**

# MESSAGE FROM THE LEADERS

All partners in RC are working in a context of severe restrictions focused on the provision of essential services and this will continue to be the case for an unknown period.

This means that current programme activities have been postponed and adapted to a social distancing context. However, all cities in the network have seen profound and speedy changes in priorities and service provision. There has been an explosion in solidarity and support action responses within communities and from third sector organisations.

If there's one thing the corona virus has highlighted, rapid and far reaching change can happen. Our systems of governance can take radical action in the face of an external threat. The corona virus isn't going away. The warming climate, destruction of wildlife habitats and erosion of biodiversity leave us increasingly at risk of zoonotic viruses.

We are living through an emergency response that shows us things can be done differently. This newsletter outlines how cities in the Rumourless Cities network have been responding to the emergency- at both a local government level and within communities.

We look at how Cardiff Council has made dramatic changes to service provision; how a project in Amadora is finding solutions to isolation confounded by social distancing and lack of access to online social networks



# MESSAGE FROM THE LEADERS

In January we undertook the Mid Term Review (MTR) and this proved to be a very positive process. The MTR allowed for a process of reflection and refocussing which resulted in all partners having clear plans regarding next steps to be undertaken in completing their transfer process.

However, it became clear that the impact of COVID-19 had created a serious problem for all partners in implementing much of what they had identified through the MTR and subsequently was agreed at the SGM in Warsaw. All partners are now working in a context of severe restrictions (lockdown is the phrase used in the press). Poland, Romania, Portugal, Italy, UK and Germany all have similar restrictions in place and this impacts on all our partner cities.

The impact of COVID-19 has at least five dimensions:

1. Impact on implementation with respect to the transfer plan actions that partners had envisaged at local level for the period February 2020-July 2020
2. Impact on the planned transnational actions
3. Impact on deliverables
4. Impact on closure and budget
5. Impact on functioning of ULG's

The lead Partner with both the lead and ad hoc experts have undertaken a mapping of the impacts of Covid 19 and the steps that partners are able to take to mitigate these. This mapping exercise involved the production of an initial discussion paper with some proposed questions to discuss with partners individually. This paper and proposed questions were discussed collectively by all partners and then individual sessions were then held with each partner.

**"The new East Wing is truly an opportunity for more learning and innovation..."**

*Mayor John Pelt*

## KEY MESSAGES

\*\*Staff redeployment and reorientation of priorities will continue for an unknown period as there is no clear end date for this crisis. The immediate crisis will be followed by a recovery period before more normal operations can resume

\*\*Where possible and subject to staff capacity, some activities are being adapted and delivered online

\*\*Where possible, to fill staff capacity gaps, some activities may be contracted out to be delivered by external agencies

\*\*In all cases, ULGs are not meeting during this current lockdown phase due to having other priorities and online working not being possible for all members

\*\*For activities which are led by ULG partners, it will be at their discretion whether they can reschedule or carry out activities.

\*\*As several partners have a strong focus on schools, much rests on when the schools will reopen and what time it will take before schools are operating normally.

\*\*While there will be some delays it is expected that all parts will deliver the required communication deliverables.

\*\*Based on the findings of the survey, our current timetable projection is to complete the project by April 2021 (subject to circumstances and any changes).

\*\*Some, if not all, partners may require to re-programme their budgets and get agreement with URBACT to increase the number of days for staff.

# THEATER ON THE TELEPHONE BREAKS THE ISOLATION OF THE ELDERLY



Despite numerous initiatives that have been observed in social networks, with the transmission of several shows in streaming, there are sections of the population who have no access to these initiatives, particularly the elderly, especially those living alone. But now, there is a way to break this isolation, in these days that can become more difficult to overcome: **Theater on the Telephone**.

## **Who said that theater cannot be done at a distance?**

Following the *Teatro de Identidades* (Identity Theater) project the team of pedagogical artists that energizes it will continue to maintain contact with the elderly participating in the project, but at a distance from a telephone call.

Some of the activities that are being developed are: **I tell and you tell** - Short stories that stimulate creativity, so that seniors continue them / **Good news** - News that has marked their lives, with optimistic information / **Stories created by seniors themselves**, who tell them to artist-educators / Seniors who are more expeditious, **call those who are more fragile**, their peers / **Reading short stories on the phone**, inspired by the book *Stories on the phone* by Gianni Rodari, artist pedagogue of the Reggio Emilia schools.

**A play will emerge** from all these experiences, which is expected to be released next October, the month in which the Month of the Elderly is celebrated. Seniors who participate in the *Teatro de Identidades* usually attend the Amadora Day Centers, which are now closed. As it is not possible to continue to develop this work in the usual spaces, attempts are made to combat the isolation that many of these elderly people have been forced through telephone calls by educational artists.

## **About the Teatro de Identidades (Identity Theater)**

A partnership between the Municipality of Amadora, the School of Theater and Cinema and the Association of Friends of the School of Theater and Cinema, the *Teatro de Identidades* intends to boost theatrical practice among the senior population that it is integrated in Day Centers and the community in general, promoting active aging, inclusion and accessibility to art.

## **Links:**

<https://www.facebook.com/TeatroDeIdentidades>

<https://www.timeout.pt/lisboa/pt/noticias/ha-uma-peca-de-teatro-a-ser-criada-ao-telefone-com-idosos-da-amadora-040320>

<https://www.cm-amadora.pt/4256-covid-19-teatro-ao-telefone-quebra-isolamento-de-idosos.html>

# THEATER ON THE TELEPHONE BREAKS THE ISOLATION OF THE ELDERLY



# CARDIFF COUNCIL – COVID-19 RESPONSE

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented local authorities across Europe with extraordinary and unprecedented challenges to maintain essential public services and ensure the wellbeing of their inhabitants. In Cardiff this has meant redeploying staff to cover essential duties, setting up new forms of governance and rapidly innovating our service infrastructure. Staff and community members have been working together to provide a response addressing the health and wellbeing risks to the community. In this article, we provide a snapshot of just a few of the ways in which Cardiff Council has approached emergent issues presented by COVID-19, exploring food security, health infrastructure, and increased demand on frontline services.

The Council is evolving its services rapidly and adapting to the “new normal” in order to provide urgent responses to challenges on many fronts in the city. Free school meals provision has been adapted to provide children in low income families with a substitute while schools are closed. Patients have just begun to arrive at the ‘Dragon Heart Hospital’, one of the many field hospitals which are being opened to extend the National Health Service’s capacity. Staff in the Council and volunteers have taken on new roles to do their bit for the community and keep essential services moving.

## Free School Meals

Primary and secondary school pupils will get free school meals if their family receives certain types of state benefits. Since schools were first closed on 23 March, there has been ongoing provision in different forms. During the first two weeks, council staff and external partners delivered 45,000 free school meal lunch packs.

By the start of the third week, the Council launched its voucher-based solution which gave parents £40 per child each fortnight to spend on food items. Parents received a letter with information on how to download the vouchers, which can be used in most chain supermarkets. Referral pathways were put in place to provide additional support if families had difficulty accessing the vouchers. In addition to this provision, from the 27 April 2020 an additional option was added – direct bank transfers to parents. If someone does not have access to a bank account however, they can opt to continue receiving vouchers. Cabinet Member for Education, Employment and Skills, Cllr Sarah Merry said: “Ensuring that children and young people do not go without food during school closures has been a priority and we hope that this new arrangement will mean families have more choice and flexibility on where they purchase their children’s food. It also means that those adults who are self-isolating can still provide meals with the option of shopping online.”



# CARDIFF COUNCIL – COVID-19 RESPONSE

## Dragon Heart Field Hospital

A rugby stadium in the centre of Cardiff, the Principality Stadium, was transformed into a temporary hospital so that adequate ICU facilities can be provided to the National Health Service (NHS).

The temporary hospital, named Dragon's Heart Hospital, will provide capacity for up to 2,000 additional beds to support the NHS in Wales during the coronavirus pandemic. Patients who are coming to the end of their treatment for Covid-19 and require rehabilitation and support, or end-of-life palliative care will be transferred to the Dragon's Heart Hospital. Facilities include mobile x-ray, CT scanners and an assured oxygen supply. The next-door Cardiff Blues stadium will act as a rest area for staff and a reception area for relatives.

Welsh Rugby Union, Cardiff Council, Cardiff Blues in addition to private and public sector partners worked hard behind the scenes to ensure that the Dragon's Heart Hospital was up and running ready for the NHS to use. Cllr Caro Wild Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Transport said: "This project shows what can be done at phenomenal speed in very difficult circumstances. Council staff from a number of departments including planning, highways, building control and economic development have been working hard behind the scenes to ensure that the project could be delivered and the facility operates correctly."

## Staff redeployment

As a result of the unfolding Coronavirus crisis, a shift to prioritising crucial council services and protect the vulnerable and those at risk in our city was made possible by Cardiff Council staff volunteering to change their current job roles.

Cardiff Council has redeployed 350+ workers since the start of the crisis. Staff were identified for redeployment through a Council-wide skills survey launched in mid-March. For many it means a huge change to the areas they work in and the daily roles they undertake. It could be an office worker, now delivering Meals on Wheels, supporting the homeless or collecting waste.

Identifying, matching and utilizing these skills in such a short time frame illustrates the diversity, adaptability and commitment of the workforce. Staff who can are working at home where possible, but frontline roles delivering essential services continues and this redeployment will be hugely important in keeping important services going. Cllr Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation & Performance said, "The response from members of staff who are willing to voluntarily be redeployed has been fantastic and the job roles they will now perform are vital to the city and its residents moving forward through these unprecedented times."



# CARDIFF COUNCIL – COVID-19 RESPONSE

## Community Volunteering Scheme

Together for Cardiff is using the good will of people across our city to help others at these challenging times.

Volunteers from the Together for Cardiff scheme are supporting Council services to ensure that vulnerable people are able to get the provisions and support they need at this difficult time.

Almost 1,200 volunteers have registered to help and many of them are now assisting staff from the Hubs and Libraries Service and Into Work service at our Dominion's Way facility in picking packing and delivering food parcels to residents across the city.

Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Cllr Lynda Thorne, said: "A crisis can bring out the best in many people and that is certainly proving true as we seek to come together to ensure each other's needs are met during this challenging time. The figures speak for themselves - just amazing, thank you so much Cardiff!"

While one Together for Cardiff volunteer who is delivering emergency parcels around the city said: "It's a great scheme the council have set up where those of us who can do so actually get a chance to help those in real need. Everyone I have visited has been really grateful but looking after each other is the least we can do in these difficult times."

Since the start of the crisis, 3,200 food and essential parcels have been distributed or delivered to people self-isolating or in need of food provision around the city.

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It is clear that local authorities and other essential public services are on the frontline of this crisis. We have strong relationships with our local voluntary sector, community and faith partners and we have taken steps to ensure that our local approach to COVID-19 understands and responds to the experiences of protected characteristic groups and our most marginalised residents.

In recent weeks we engaged in early and proactive dialogue with our local partners to understand how COVID-19 may impact different groups, and identify ways to mitigate the social and economic impacts of this crisis on our most deprived communities. The stark inequalities which exist in our society have never been more visible, and our city's approach to managing this crisis and recovery must be driven by a clear vision for inclusion.

Whilst COVID-19 brings significant tragedy and struggle, there are glimpses of hope and opportunity for a fairer future. This could be a reset moment for equality and human rights if there is the will and cities like Cardiff will be seeking to capitalise on any chances we have to rebuild a stronger and more inclusive city.



# THE TOWN ON THE STRAIGHT

Messina such as other Italian towns and all over the world has been attacked by the so-called invisible monster.

In a few days and even in a few hours without understanding what was happening, all the citizens had to shelter to home to protect from infection, but also and first of all to comply to a series of decrees of the Council of Ministers and a series of Ordinances of Local Authorities.

A pacey series of instructions, civic and healthy rules with political, scientific and technical debates. A sudden shock with no record. Schools, work, families, affective relationship, friendships and allis round a community had to collapse to a sanitary emergency to a superior necessity.

We had unprepared and confused; we have still thrilled and unprotected, we all with no distinction. The town on the Straight, with its important, touristic and hospitable harbour with its embrace of lamps and lights reflected on the sea mirror, is silent and still yet. Meanwhile, along the wide and empty street under a clear spring sky a new odyssey is acting.

Just like "Nobody Ulysses" who is at the moment among us, the bewitching song of the sirens becomes a frightening sound of ambulances and helicopters have driven by men and women to whom we will be grateful for ever.

Our tank giving that like a soft breeze, the smell of sea and the colours of day and night articulate passing time, week after week, it is remembering that being alive yet still is not a little thing.

Among the infinite number of questions ringing in our minds, we think once more about all those who are in worse conditions than us. The so-called social distancing and the isolation debilitate most the social outcasts.

And while everything has stopped, Nature and its theatre offer a performance of whales and dolphins dancing on water surface.

Also seagulls and other kinds of birds are keeping on watching what is happening on earth.

## **BRIEF FOR URBACT COMMUNITY (NUPS, NETWORK EXPERTS AND PARTNERS)**

**We're looking for blog posts that are:**

**Short contributions, either shared experiences or views on the impact and implications of covid 19 for cities**

**Positive and solution-focused to spark solidarity at local level and between cities**

**Promoting messages relevant to city leaders and stakeholders**

**Format**

**Max 800 words**

**Try to keep paragraphs to 2-3 sentences**

**Use subheadings to break up the post**

**Include examples or quotes**

**Include hyperlinks where needed**

**Suggest photos, videos or social media posts to embed in the text**

**Adapt your writing style to the context**

**Try to be sensitive and positive (some readers may suffer from stress, anxiety or covid19 right now!)**

**Be cautious, the situation changes every day so:**

**Use words like "experiences" and "responses" rather than "solutions"**

**Don't hesitate to ask questions, at the end of a paragraph or even in the title and the sub headings**

**URBACT Secretariat may edit your post before publishing it and will also add the following disclaimer:**

**The content of this blog should be understood in the context of information available on X. URBACT Secretariat encourages exchanges of information and ideas but the views expressed here are those of the author(s) and do not represent the views of URBACT Secretariat.**

**How and when to submit a post?**

**Email your post to [communication@urbact.eu](mailto:communication@urbact.eu). We'll try to upload your post onto the blog as quickly as we can. We can also promote it on our social media.**

**We'll accept blog posts related to covid 19 until at least the end of the lock down period in Europe.**

**If you have any questions, email [a.fauvel@urbact.eu](mailto:a.fauvel@urbact.eu).**

**Please note that blog posts are voluntary and unpaid contributions.**

**Thanks in advance !**

**The editorial team**