

DARLINGTON SUPPORT

Helping our community during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond



Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0EU

9th September 2020

Subject: Invitation to NHS Volunteer Responders to join Darlington Support

Dear Secretary of State,

We hope this letter finds you well.

While we are Councillors who represent each political group on Darlington Borough Council, we are writing in our capacity as trustees of Darlington Support.

We would like to invite the NHS Volunteer Responders who are based in Darlington to join our charity, Darlington Support.

We believe that this collaboration would ensure that our town is better prepared should a second wave of the coronavirus occur in the coming months. In addition, this would enable the selfless community of volunteers in Darlington to work more effectively together over the long-term.

We also believe that similar partnerships between the NHS Volunteer Responders and local voluntary organisations in other parts of the country would bring many advantages to areas across the United Kingdom. This is because these collaborations would allow many compassionate individuals to find out about more volunteering opportunities and how to make additional contribution to their communities.

Background:

By way of introduction, Darlington Support was set up when our community came together earlier in the year to confront the COVID-19 virus and to deal with the new challenges faced as a result of the pandemic. The response from the people of Darlington to this initiative has been phenomenal. Shortly after we launched, we became one of the largest groups in the country to tackle the outbreak at a local level. It goes to show how kind-hearted and generous the people of Darlington are.

We started by assisting residents who were shielding with tasks such as shopping, prescriptions and dog-walking. We established a call centre, a system to manage the tasks and a companion call team. We entered into a partnership with Darlington Borough Council to help more people in our town who required our support.

However, we have since expanded the services that we offer and are supporting many other local organisations and charities, including Darlington Library, King's Church Foodbank, Age UK and Healthwatch. In addition, we assisted other initiatives and local groups such as the Friends of the Denes and the Friends of North Road Cemetery, the School Uniform Shop and Community Clothesline. We are planning a litter-picking day later this week and we will be organising tree-planting activities next month.

We also worked with local schools to cheer the town's residents up, organised training sessions for our team members and planned a socially-distanced event to celebrate the work of our volunteers in the presence of the Mayor of Darlington.

We are proud that hundreds of our volunteers across tens of teams have supported local residents on thousands of occasions over the past six months.

Plan:

As we look to the future, we have ambitious plans for both our community and our volunteers. This is why our grassroots organisation has recently become a registered charity.

We are wondering if it would be possible to invite the NHS Volunteer Responders who are based in Darlington to join our team of volunteers so we make sure that motivated and skilled volunteers from across our town stay connected, active and organised. This would also reduce the risk of losing the community contribution of hundreds of public-spirited volunteers.

As the NHS Volunteer Responders have been carrying out their valuable community work through a national organisation, there is no framework to enable them to help and assist other good causes and charities in Darlington. However, they have the potential of making an additional contribution to our town if they join Darlington Support and start receiving information about new volunteering opportunities across Darlington. We would like to ensure that there is one local strong group in Darlington to create a positive legacy out of this pandemic.

It is already the case that many volunteers in Darlington are both members of Darlington Support and the NHS Volunteer Responder team. Therefore, joining our team would not prevent the NHS Volunteer Responders in Darlington from continuing to do their critical work in our community.

If the above proposal is of interest, we would be grateful if it is possible to direct us to the right official with whom we could liaise to explore the best practical way to invite Darlington's NHS Volunteer Responders to join Darlington Support.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to review this letter. We look forward to hearing from you. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to let us know should you require any additional information.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Anne-Marie Curry (Liberal Democrats group leader)
Councillor Chris McEwan (Mayor of Darlington / Labour group)
Councillor Darrien Wright (Independent group)
Councillor Matthew Snedker (Green Party group leader)
Councillor Mike Renton (Conservative group)
Councillor Pauline Culley (Chair of the Conservative Association)
Councillor Stephen Harker (Labour group leader)