



Community insights on Covid 19 Mutual Aid WhatsApp groups in Tower Hamlets

Dec 2020

healthwatch
Tower Hamlets



In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, local people organised in mutual aid groups using WhatsApp.

We analysed 116 groups with approximately 4372 members

(some people can be members of more than one group)



Neighbourhood/ ward level groups (90-160 members)



Council estate groups (10-80 members)

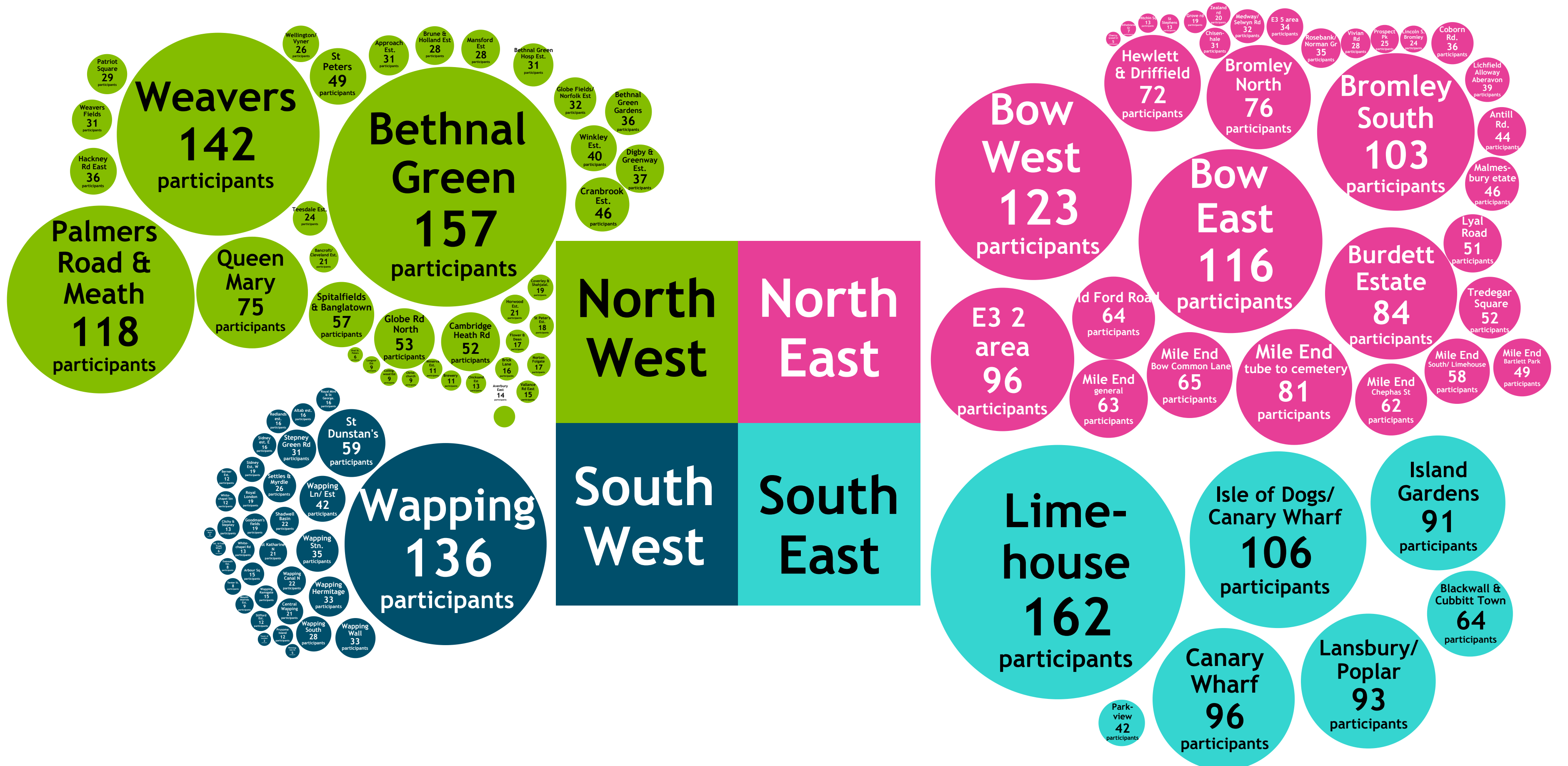


Street level groups (under 60 members)

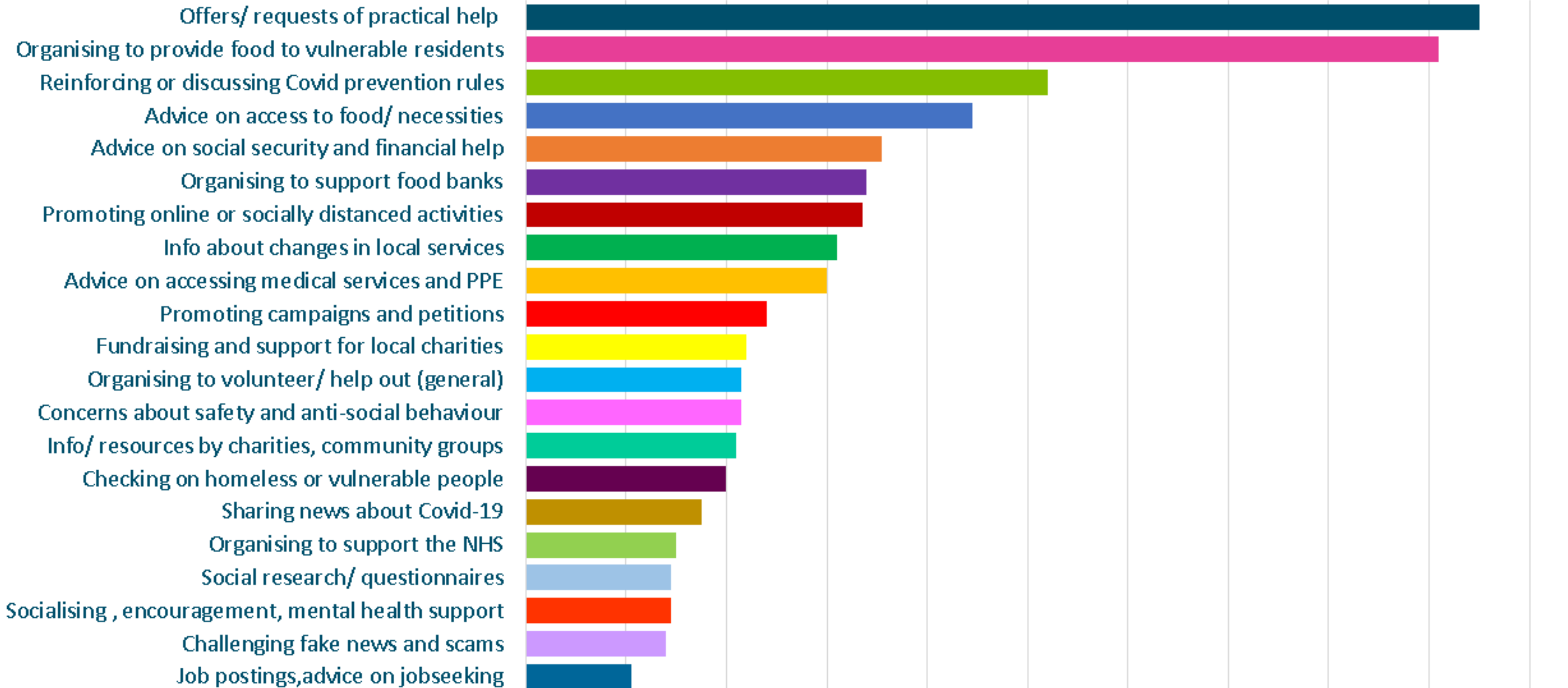




Whatsapp Groups-Covid19 mutual support



Functions of WhatsApp Groups



Based on thematic analysis of 1563 messages

0 20 40 60 80 100 120 140 160 180 200

Functions of WhatsApp Groups

Access to food and necessities

Groups of council estate residents, local community groups, charities and local authorities organised together to provide basic necessities (including hot food) to those in need, including low income families with children on low incomes, older and vulnerable residents with care and shielding needs.

Local people organised to support local food banks through donations and volunteering.

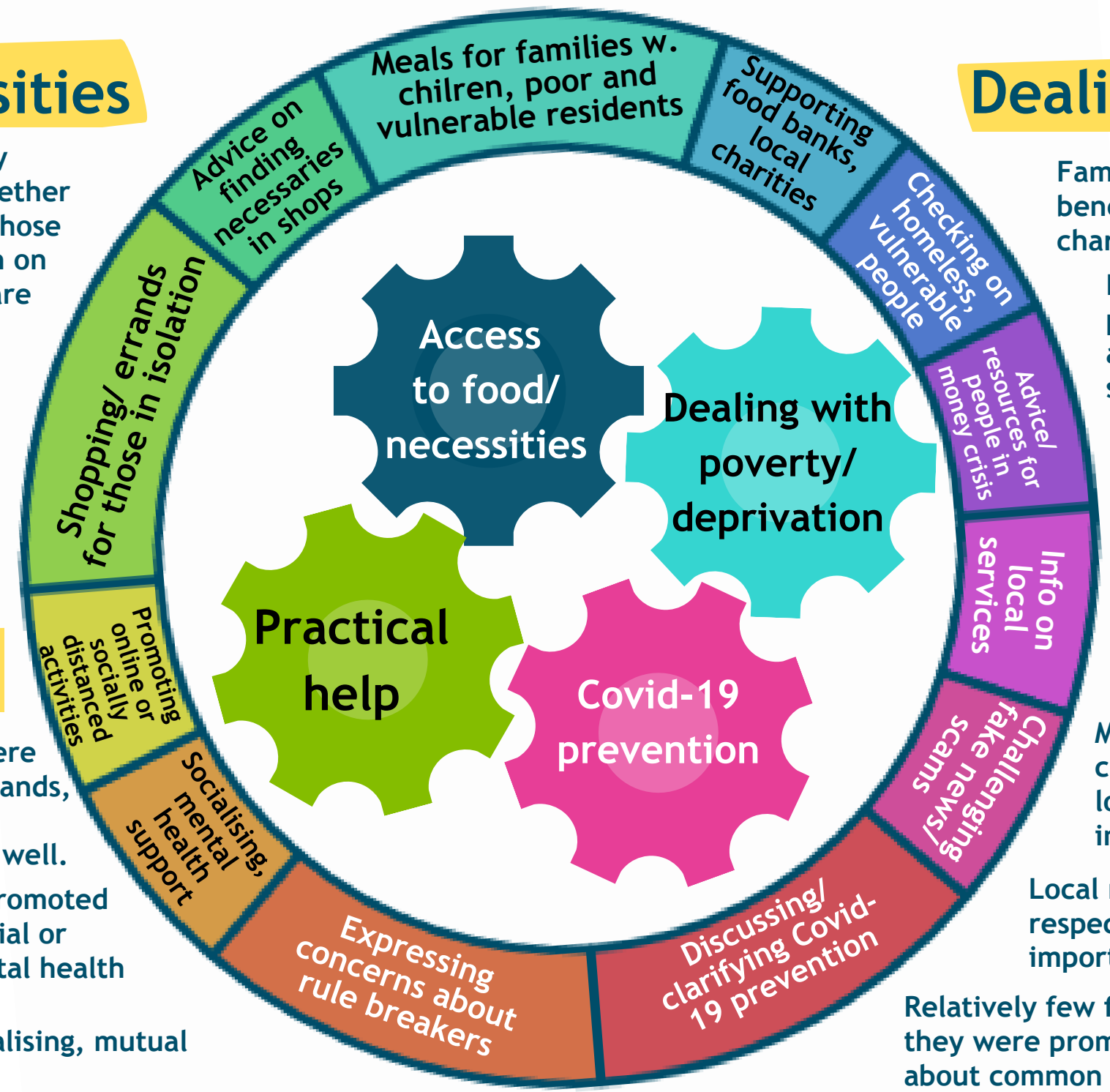
As access to supermarkets and supply chains were disrupted in the first weeks of lockdown, residents used WhatsApp groups to exchange information on where to find various items and on how shops adapted their schedules in the pandemic.

Practical help

Local residents who were shielding or vulnerable were able to post requests for help with shopping and errands, that other answered. Some referred their digitally excluded neighbours and arranged help for them as well.

Local businesses, charities and community groups promoted online or socially distanced events- educational, social or physical activity-based, such as yoga classes or mental health support groups.

The groups themselves provided an outlet for socialising, mutual encouragement and peer mental health support.



Dealing with poverty/ deprivation

Families in crisis could access information on how to apply for benefits and emergency grants, from the State or local charities.

Local residents expressed concerns about homeless people and about those known to them to be vulnerable/ at risk, in order to support them with accessing the services they needed.

Postings about local jobs and advice on jobseeking were featured.

Advice on budgeting, cooking and coping at home was featured.

Covid-19 prevention

Many people felt that the Government failed to provide clarity on Covid-19 prevention rules, around masks, lockdown and social distancing. By discussing these issues in WhatsApp groups, local people understood them better.

Local residents expressed concerns about neighbours failing to respect lockdown/ social distancing rules and reinforced their importance.

Relatively few fake news/ pseudoscientific messages were posted, and they were promptly challenged by group admins and members. Warnings about common scams were also disseminated.

Who used WhatsApp Groups?

Between April and June 2020, we conducted a survey with 385 respondents on their experience in the Covid-19 pandemic.

25%

of survey respondents used local mutual support WhatsApp Groups.

of those who used Mutual Aid groups:

- 15% asked the group for help with shopping, errands or other needs.
- 37% helped someone from a group with shopping, errands or other needs
- 13% asked the group for advice and information.
- 44% offered advice or information in a group.

