

To build back stronger after Covid-19, we need to put more trust in people and communities

Foreword by David Bernstein, Chair of Trustees at British Red Cross

It has been my great privilege to have served as the Chair of the British Red Cross for nearly eight years, a deeply trusted humanitarian institution that celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2020. It has been said before, but this past year has been like no other, and the Red Cross has been there to help the most vulnerable in the face of the global pandemic, both at home and overseas.

In its lifetime, the Red Cross has responded to many cataclysmic events that have shaped our nation's psyche: two World Wars, the Aberfan mining disaster, the Lockerbie bombing, the 7/7 bombings, the Manchester arena attack, the Grenfell Tower fire, and more. The Red Cross is a part of our history and so many of our lives – indeed, my own uncle Joe worked alongside Red Cross teams in his role as an interpreter at the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945.

The British Red Cross also works with other national Red Cross societies around the

world to respond to international disasters, including the devastating Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004 and recently, the Australian bushfires and the Beirut port explosion in 2020. My own time on the governing board of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) showed me the extraordinary humanitarian feats this global movement can accomplish by pulling together across borders.

The central role the Red Cross has played around the world in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic highlights that the organisation is as essential now as it ever has been.

Covid-19 has dominated our thoughts and actions over the past year. As we start to look beyond the pandemic, we have been handed an unparalleled opportunity to reimagine our future and build back stronger. This includes pulling together to overcome major challenges, both those created by the pandemic and those which have sadly been exacerbated by it.

David Bernstein



With such a long history of supporting people through crisis, what has the Red Cross learnt, that can help steer and shape our preparation for and response to future crisis?

Something that inspires me about the Red Cross is the enormous difference it makes to people as they experience some of their darkest hours. Its volunteers and staff are embedded in local communities all over the UK, and bring dignity, power and options in moments of personal or societal crisis.

The Red Cross practices kindness in action.

Its work begins with an assumption that individuals and communities know best what they need to get through any crisis they face. Ask someone what they need, right now, and give it to them. What you're really giving

is trust. What you're really saying is, this is tough but we can get through this together.

We believe that to build back stronger after the Covid-19 pandemic, we need to put more trust in people and communities.

Think back to those first days of UK lockdown, as support systems sprung up in neighbourhoods across the country, delivering incredible acts of kindness and connection to those in need of help. In this crisis, the communities of this country have not proved wanting. As we move forwards, we should look to and work with local people to find fresh answers, try new things and make ourselves stronger for the future.

Building local resilience is critical. While the Red Cross is perhaps best known for its emergency response to disasters and extreme weather events, the worldwide

movement also supports communities across the globe to prepare for and recover from major shocks and knocks. Because while some crises are unexpected, many are years in the making and years in recovery.

Take an issue that is now absolutely critical: tackling climate change. While much of the public conversation on climate change looks to the future, we must help communities deal with the devastating impact climate change is having, right now.

From the family who can't put food on the table because their crops have been washed away, to the family made homeless because their house has been destroyed by a major weather event, the Red Cross is there, working to help communities protect themselves from the harshest impacts of climate change, both in the UK and around the world.

We need to see real global commitment and investment in supporting communities to deal with the impacts of climate change today. The Red Cross is leading the way and has played a key role, alongside a number of countries, the UK government and the Met Office, in launching a major initiative to make 1 billion people around the world safer from disasters by 2025. The Risk-Informed Early Action Partnership includes hugely innovative areas, including getting cash to people in advance of a significant weather event hitting their community.

Wherever you are in the world, building resilient communities will save lives and protect communities from harm.



To mark the charity's 150th anniversary, this collection of essays brings together a diverse and impressive range of expert voices looking towards tomorrow. They explore how we address three burning issues of our time that are central to the British Red Cross's new Strategy 2030: Health inequalities; Displacement and migration; and Disasters and emergencies.

Individually, these essays suggest practical solutions to individual challenges across these themes: Kim Leadbeater emphasises the importance of addressing loneliness and building togetherness as we recover from Covid-19; Sir Iain Duncan Smith states the importance of greater protections for survivors of modern slavery

in the UK; and Nimco Ali calls for more power and funding to be put in the hands of African women to eradicate female genital mutation once and for all.

Together, these essays provide a powerful vision for what we want our future to be – one that places people at its heart and is built on connectedness and resilience.

The crises we are currently facing haven't taken us by surprise, but rather are long-building, protracted crises that are having an ongoing detrimental impact on individuals and communities and which we have the opportunity to tackle head on.

One thing is for sure: we must tackle them together.

