

Voluntary Sector Support

Supporting a vibrant and independent voluntary sector



healthwatch
West Sussex

Voluntary Sector Response to COVID-19



Horsham District Voluntary Sector Support and Healthwatch West Sussex are working together to support the Horsham District Voluntary Sector during the Coronavirus pandemic

August 2020

Introduction

Horsham District Voluntary Sector Support (VSS), and Healthwatch West Sussex (HWWS) are working collaboratively to gather information from the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). Our aim is to capture the challenges, impact on staff, volunteers, service users, parishioners', financial impact, future planning due to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic to understand how, as a sector, we learn from this.

We are also working with Sussex Community Foundation (SCF) who will use the Resilience Survey information to help plan and shape their funding of grants to best meet VCS needs.

This report is a snapshot of the views captured via our online Resilience Survey, completed by 16 organisations operating services across the Horsham District. The survey consisted of 21 questions (designed in conjunction with sector leaders) to understand the current impact on service provision, staff, volunteers and service users/members/parishioners' as well as financial, funding and forward planning. The survey was open from 10th June until 20th July 2020 and promoted through e-bulletins from VSS and HWWS.

We heard how VCS leaders responded initially to Covid-19, which was for all a frantic period of adjustment having to:

- Temporarily close face to face services, and for many changing services to virtual/home based working, in many cases from scratch.
- Support staff and volunteers - including reallocating staff to other roles, enabling staff to work from home, furloughing staff, and taking care of volunteers.
- Finding innovative ways to shore up finances and many other operational tasks and decisions.

The survey was completed in the eighteenth week of lockdown and restrictions are beginning to ease, many are planning for recovery within ever-changing and at times confusing Government guidance.

The VCS has shown leadership, compassion and connectedness, and has been creative in how it has continued to support its volunteers, service users, members, parishioners and the local community.

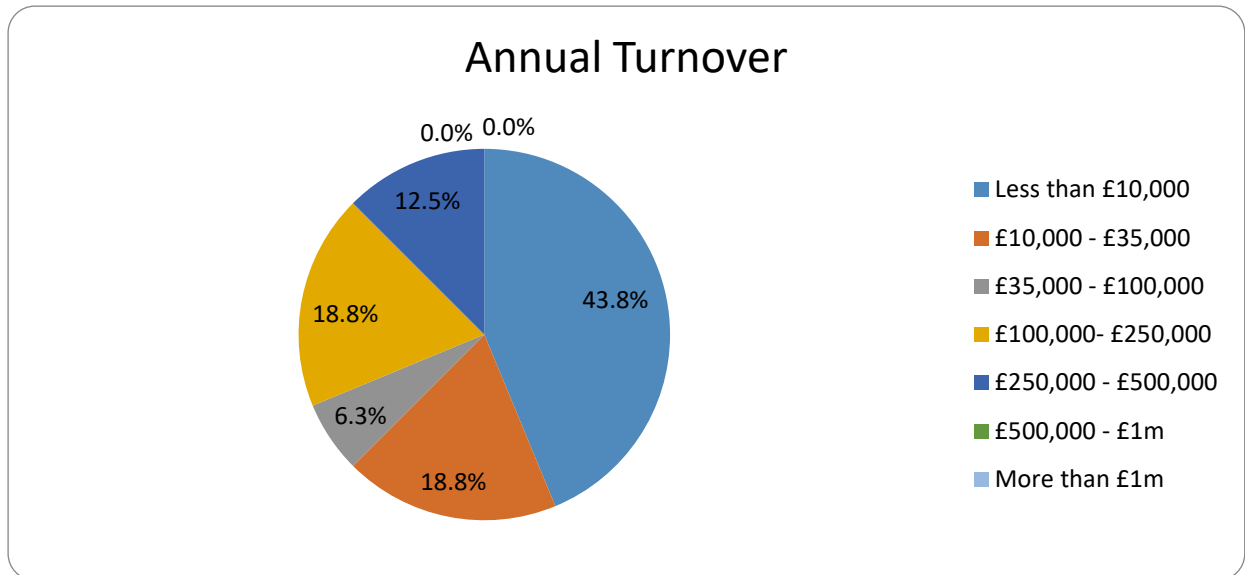


They are the unsung heroes of the Covid-19 crisis along with the many thousands of local people who have supported their communities.



Resilience Survey findings

Just under half of the (16) organisations who completed the survey were registered charities (44%), with 50% (8) organisations run solely by volunteers. The range of income for these organisations is:



Service closures

All organisations had to close their face-to-face service provision, in line with Government guidance.

- Not being able to meet in person, not being able to give support to our parishioners and community in person.
- Temporary closed service to clients.
- Playgrounds closed; football fields not operational.
- Not being able to physically gather to worship together.
- Unable to carry out face-to-face meetings - loss of revenue as a consequence.
- Not being able to meet people face to face.
- Cancelled meetings and deferred decisions.

“ Not able to offer our usual events, but have provided other services to help people during the lockdown enjoy their exercise in the park and to educate children missing school for example: Tree of the Week and Wildlife A to Z.

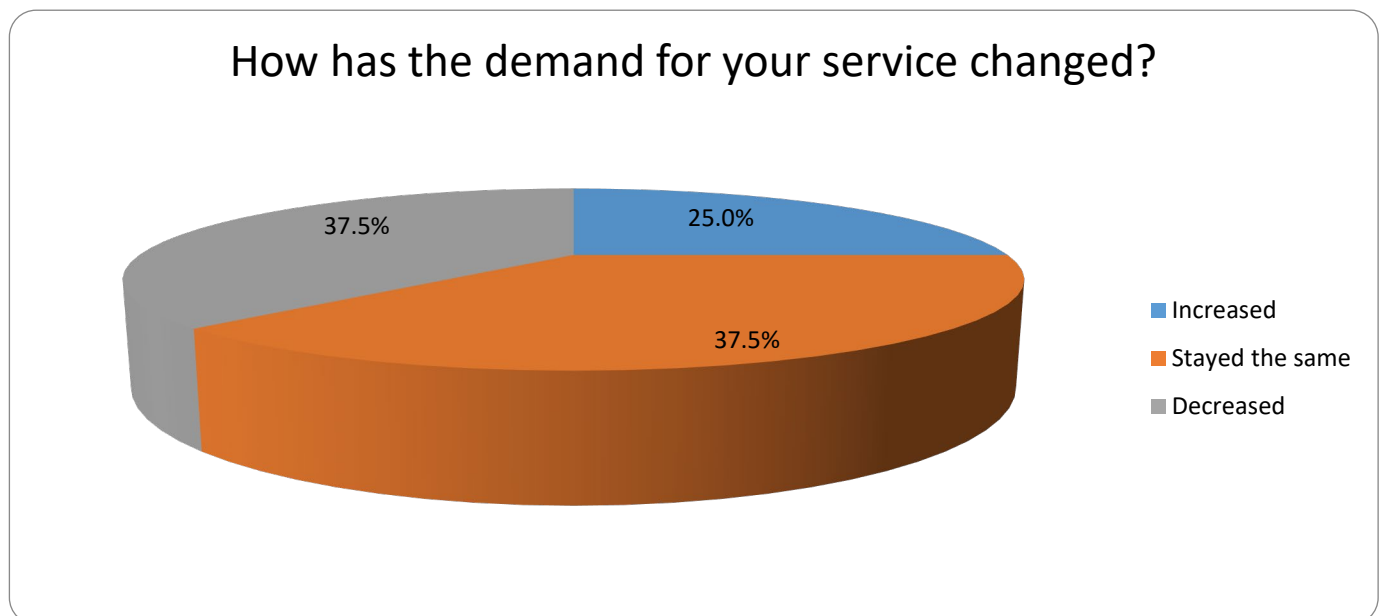
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The closure of services meant that 3 organisations had to furlough staff. 13 more had services delivered completely by volunteers, but many volunteers were in the 'at risk' category so needed to shield/self-isolate.

The number of volunteers supporting organisations pre-Covid-19 ranged from 10-600 active volunteers. This number dropped to between 2-300 active volunteers during the crisis.

Changes in demand

Organisations changed to virtual services and demand for services generally increased by 25% and the current situation is changing rapidly:



Practical challenges

The practical challenges have been numerous;

- Moving all activities online but this is not possible for all members.
- Not being able to run fundraising and conservation events.
- Volunteers not allowed to work in the park for 10 weeks.
- Not being able to physically meet as a Committee.
- Starting from scratch. For details of set up see www.amberleyhelpline.co.uk
- Lack of income from supporters.
- Not being able to physically gather to worship together.
- Lots - too many to write in 10 minutes!
- Unable to help the community as a club or raise money.

Impact on Staff, Volunteers, Service Users/Parishioners

The impact of Covid-19 for many staff has been the loss of the community and companionship of others. *“The loss of community, loss of connection, more complex to care for each other and serve the community.”*

Staff have been furloughed or working on reduced hours, some have found it, *“challenging to pick up colleagues work while dealing with the ever-changing crisis,”* and planning changed needs. Many are now working from home. *“Staff are working from home so are less aware of issues in the central village.”* However, staff have found there are opportunities to link virtually with colleagues, volunteers, service users, parishioners through Zoom, SKYPE, Facebook etc... but are having to cope with increases in traffic in these areas, *“extensive use of WhatsApp.”* Staff are ensuring that volunteers are supported and updated regularly by newsletters and updates.

Numerous volunteers had to stop providing support as they *“were from front line health and key worker services and already overwhelmed with Covid-19 additional work or changed working patterns. This meant they had no time to continue.”* Many other volunteers were ‘self-isolating’ as they’re over 70 years old, believing this to be Government guidance. (A recent [survey](#) by Independent Age found 43% of the respondents were wrongly self-isolating). Those with various health conditions have found the self-isolation has adversely affected, *“their confidence about coming in again due to concerns about their own health and those at home.”*

Whilst many volunteers have felt demoralised and frustrated by not being able to perform their roles due to closures and changes etc. Staff and volunteers have found innovative ways to provide support remotely and working cooperatively with other agencies has been especially important. There has been an increase in demand from service users in some areas e.g. neighbourhood action groups, and increased volunteer opportunities to support this.

Changed service

With many staff now working from home, the use of technology has become a vital way to communicate with volunteers, service users, members and parishioners. VCS leaders have been embracing technology with members and parishioners’, running meetings virtually across Zoom; *“live-streaming Sunday services and using zoom for all other meetings.”* They are also regularly offering help and support, for example *“church services have gone online, and started the Covid-19 Response Helpline since lockdown.”*

Working remotely and changing services has been challenging.

- Cannot collect, sort and resell books (but have been able to resume stocking a station bookshelf with a donation box).
- Supporting vulnerable people with food, etc. is still happening face to face (at a social distance).
- Community Action Groups are supporting shielded and vulnerable, to a lesser degree, but have picked up on delivering food parcels to financially challenged households.
- As a local volunteer group set up before the Hubs, being asked to change our organisation and data collection at a time when we were very busy, was challenging. But this has now been resolved, and a compromise reached.
- Part is the repair café; items being fixed are now dropped off remotely and collected remotely. All, items are wiped down before and after repair.

Finance Impact

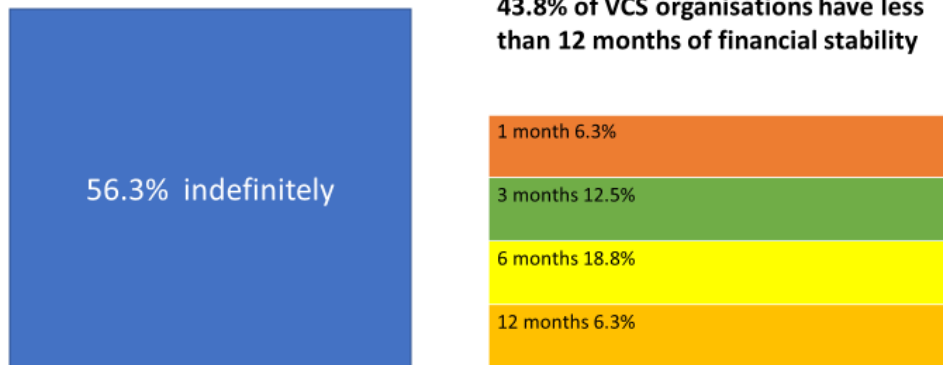
Respondents expressed real concerns about financial stability and solvency, as unrestricted funds have reduced services since the temporary closure - loss of membership fees, fundraising, venue hire, rental funds etc. With little sight of change in the foreseeable future due to continued social distancing, increased costs due to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and alternative ways of working. Just under half of organisations are extremely worried about their long-term survival. *“Our finance is reduced by some 90%.”*

The furlough scheme has been appreciated by those who’ve used it, as it has helped to protect organisational reserves.

However, groups and charities need access to unrestricted grant funds which can go towards the loss of fundraising and trading income. *“Expect our revenues to be impacted significantly as many families will not be able to afford subs at this time and fixed costs remain unchanged.”*

16 respondents, replied to the question about their organisations’ *projected lifespan*, 7 reported futures lasting 3 to 12 months, and 9 indefinitely.

If the current situation continues how many months do you expect you can continue to be financially sustainable?



This is not surprising if one factors in those with no paid staff, no premises and run solely by volunteers who are in a better financial position than those with those overheads. There is pressure as the bills keep coming in although the service may have stopped. However, 43.8% of organisations state they have fewer than 12 months of financial sustainability, if the situation remains the same. This is very concerning for the local voluntary sector, with a high number being at significant risk.

“ We have lost income during the lockdown and even if we do continue there may be staff redundancies and less money to invest in the Museum and facilities. It has been financially precarious for a number of years and this may be insurmountable.

Lower income has resulted in reduction in services including the Night Shelter.



However, 12 (80%) organisations reported not applying for COVID-19 specific grants. As supporting volunteers, service users, members and parishioners virtually did not seem to meet the criteria. Some have found they have needed to approach many organisations for grants including Sussex Community Foundation who have been supportive.

“ We have only survived Lockdown so far because of funding from the Arts Council and smaller grants and donations. As a visitor attraction and independent Museum, we are reliant on visitor income.

No success as a district but we supported some individual groups who were able to access leisure industry grants.



There has been massive fundraising cancellations and a loss of fundraising opportunity in the longer term, which is predicted to mean finances are very tight.

- Loss of hall Hire fees.
- Raise sufficient funds to pay for insurances, website and other running costs.

The loss of planned fundraising events is having a significant impact for many organisations:

- Donations, and hall hire fees.
- As a charity, we've had to cancel all our upcoming fundraising activities and events and aren't able to do any real fundraising activities.
- No income from fundraising/events.

It's not known if organisational reserves will be enough to maintain many services in the longer-term, especially if the anticipated economic recession occurs.

All organisations who responded have begun forward planning activity.

Future risks to income

A few organisations are worried about running out of money before they can begin services and fundraising again, with many more concerned they'll lose touch with volunteers, service users, members and parishioners due to social distancing and virtual working. *"The ambience and social cohesion and connection experienced on the actual day cannot be replicated remotely."*

Some are concerned about possible cuts in County Council budgets, less community grants, donations, and uncertainties surrounding income from Trusts and Foundations. In fact, groups providing a one-to-one service and/or are dependent on trading income and large-scale fundraising events are finding the situation particularly difficult.

“

Donations may dry up ongoing.

Loss of employment for donors.

Grants may be less easy to secure.

Council's budgets insufficient for the maintenance required for green spaces
- meaning we will have to try to raise funds to fill the gap.

It will decrease, but we have reserves.

”

Other areas of concern

There have been reports of increases in anxiety from those shielding and mental health issues exacerbated by the crisis: *“least 3 cases of leaders stepping back due to mental health resulting from Covid-19 concerns, changes.”*

Many people are *“angry and frustrated”* at the Governments’ poor guidelines and the period of time where there was a lack of PPE and the ongoing costs of PPE.

Concern was expressed about missing safeguarding/support and development issues not being picked up virtually which would have been if meeting face to face.

Concern of duplication in how resources have been used during the crisis for example the roles for the NHS volunteers as they were doing mostly the same as the Local Community Hub volunteers, this makes for confusion for residents, and waste of resources. Some felt that the NHS volunteers should have been for the hospitals, GP transport, medication deliveries and in-home care. As the local community hubs support with shopping, prescription collections, phone support, and dog walking.

A couple of organisations stated that they *“wanted to help with the community volunteer response, e.g. delivering shopping or prescriptions, but were constantly turned away solely because of the age of volunteers, most who are fit, healthy, active and willing.”*

VCS needs for post Covid-19

The VCS need positive communication to clarify the messages around social distancing, face coverings for example. Also, proactive support is required for example; the promotion of VCS in *Connections* or other newsletters. A celebratory event was suggested for the District to showcase the role of the VCS during the crisis to raise awareness for future volunteers and to recognise existing volunteers. Insurance is a major cost each year, maybe a Council led scheme could reduce or maybe free accountancy services for the VCS organisations.

There is a need for new volunteers for the *new virtual ways of working*, and volunteer specific resources for VCS organisations. Grants and tenders need to be simple and have a speedy response. *“Donations without the hoops, as we can account for every penny spent.”*

Summary

It has been fantastic how quickly the VCS have responded and adapted to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many voluntary and community groups moved from primarily face-to-face services to telephone/virtual ones, and while closed have maintained wellbeing contact with volunteers, service users, members and parishioners. This is remarkable, when considering that resources are so much more limited for these organisations.

The main area of focus now is sorting out financial budgets for the year ahead when fundraising activity cannot happen or will be very limited. There is great concern about possible cuts in County Council budgets, fewer community grants, donations, and uncertainties surrounding Trust and Foundation funding. This presents a very real risk of permanent closure for some, which will leave support gaps. **The fear for VCS is that valuable, often hidden, support will not be appreciated until it has gone, and peoples' lives have been negatively impacted.**

One-point worth reiterating is that groups and charities need access to unrestricted grant funds which can go towards the loss of fundraising and trading income, to keep organisations operational and not closing, thereby starving those in need within local communities across the Horsham District.

Horsham District Voluntary Sector Support response

The decision in 2018 to provide voluntary sector infrastructure support by Horsham District Council (HDC) meant that Voluntary Sector Support, alongside the Community Development team and other HDC colleagues, could respond to the community needs effectively from the very start of lockdown.

It was natural and easy for VSS and Community Development to work collaboratively with HDC's Covid-19 Response Team, especially in regard to establishing practical support in the community. Channels of communication and experience of working together had already been successfully established over the past 2 years since VSS became co-located at HDC.

Calling on VSS expertise with 'on the ground' networks, understanding of local issues, history of developing new initiatives, working with volunteers and connections with key community individuals meant that help was up and running within days rather than weeks.

Throughout the community response VSS has played a vital role in supporting volunteers, sharing guidance, helping with funding advice, working with community volunteers to resolve issues and being a point of contact for concerns or sharing information.

As restrictions lift and Community Hub volunteers (for example) ‘stand down’ from the immediate practical help they have been providing, some volunteers are looking to develop new initiatives to combat the impact of Covid-19 in their community, such as neighbourhood support schemes. VSS will continue to provide advice and support with the setting up of these new community groups and projects.

Looking at the national picture alongside the invaluable feedback from the respondents to this survey, the coming months and indeed years are not without significant and unprecedented challenge for the voluntary sector. There are key priorities that VSS are well placed to support the sector with during this challenging period and into the future. These are:

- **Funding.** Including working with Horsham District Council’s Community Development team to identify further **unrestricted funds** for community organisations. And encouraging and supporting the sector locally to apply for government grants administered by the local authority.
- **Governance and group development.** Supporting the sector to re-prioritise where needed. Alongside supporting with information and guidance to enable the sector to return with confidence to delivering against their charitable objectives to best support local people safely.
- **Volunteering.** To further develop volunteering locally, including building on the enthusiasm of those volunteers who so willingly put their hand up to support the Covid response. Just shy of 2,000 local residents registered in response to the HDC’s Covid-19 Response Team call for support.

The pandemic has only further cemented the strength of the voluntary sector locally. It’s brought new and long-standing volunteers to resident’s doors, with local people being supported in some instances for the very first time by the voluntary sector. A huge raft of new volunteers have got “*stuck in*” whether on the phone befriending, picking up prescriptions or delivering food - the task has been enormous - but the sector has shown resilience and teamwork at its best.

The past few months has again emphasised the sector’s nimbleness and ability to collaborate effectively with others across multiple and complex hurdles and barriers. Having the same shared agenda across sectors, with everyone working effectively together on joint priorities, is something that everyone should be very proud of.

VSS look forward to continuing to collaborate with, support, lobby and advocate for and advise our partners and colleagues in the voluntary sector as their local infrastructure provider.

Statement from VSS Scrutiny Group chair - Denise Campbell

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted how dynamic and responsive the voluntary sector (in the Horsham District area) can be in helping their local communities by having immediate and effective responses to the concerns of their residents. This has been made possible through the ‘light touch’ and invaluable support of the Voluntary Sector Support Team within HDC. They (HDVSS) have understood that each community has different needs and resources at their disposal, and that each community has different parameters in which they work; some with well-established community organisations and some fledgling ones. Without this collaboration and being able to capitalise on trusted local connections between VSS Team and local voluntary organisations, it is unlikely that the support given in the community would have been as swift or as effective.

It is hoped that the relationships forged, established and strengthened during Covid-19 pandemic over the last 5 months (between the voluntary organisations and HDVSS) will prove to be a building block for creating new and collaborative grassroots community projects based on the needs of local communities rather than Council driven agendas.

Denise Campbell

Chair of Billingshurst Community Partnership
Chair of Voluntary Sector Support Scrutiny Group

Next Steps

Our next collaborative report will be to share the findings from our semi-structured phone interviews with VCS leaders.

Thank you

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all organisations who took the time to complete the survey.

Amberley Covid-19 Helpline Hub
Amberley Museum
Chanctonbury Lions Club
Friends of Chesworth Farm
Friends of Horsham Park
Horsham District Scouts
Horsham Debt Advice Service
Lifespring
Rudgwick Church
Rudgwick Covid-19 Community Care Group
Southwater Community Partnership
Sussex Green Living
St John the Evangelist Catholic Church, Horsham
Thakeham Parish Council
Chanctonbury Churches (Ashington/Washington/Wiston Hub)
West Chiltington & Nutbourne Action Group

Appendix one: Voluntary Sector Resilience Survey Questions

1. **Your name**

Name of organisation

Your role

2. **Organisation Structure (tick all that apply)**

Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

Community Interest Company (CIC)

Company limited by Guarantee

Company limited by Shares

A Mutual Society

Registered Charity

Group or unincorporated association

Don't know

Other (please specify)

3. **Annual Turnover**

Less than £10,000

£10,000 - £35,000

£35,000 - £100,000

£100,000- £250,000

£250,000 - £500,000

£500,000 - £1m

More than £1m

4. How many full time equivalent (fte) staff do you have?

5. How many staff have you furloughed?

6. How will your revenue be affected once the 80% payment ceases?

7. What have been the practical challenges, as an organisation, you have had to deal with due to Covid-19?

8. How has this impacted on staff, volunteers and service users?

9. How many volunteers did you have in January 2020?

10. How many of these volunteers are currently volunteering?
11. How has the demand for your service changed?
Increased
Stayed the same
Decreased
12. Have you had to close/put on hold all or part of your service?
Yes / No
13. If you are maintaining a service how has it changed?
14. What are the top 3 areas of service delivery that are most at risk?
15. If the current situation continues how many months do you expect you can continue to be financially sustainable?
1 month
3 months
6 months
12 months
Indefinitely
16. What are the top 3 income streams (trusts, trading, donations, community fundraising...) most at risk?
17. What are the possible risks to your income in the medium term?
18. Have you applied for the various Covid-19 support grants?
If yes which ones?
How successful was the application?
19. What are the key areas of support that you think is needed?
 - a) as an organisation
 - b) for the overall voluntary sector
20. Have you begun forward planning for the organisation once the lock down eases?
Yes / No
21. Other information specific to your organisation.



Sussex Community Foundation is a local charity that provides funding for grassroots charities and community groups across Sussex. It offers a bespoke service for donors - individuals, families, companies and charitable trusts - helping them to support the causes they care about in the local community. The Foundation is also building an endowment fund to provide sustainable funding for local communities.

In March 2020, the Foundation launched the Sussex Crisis Fund to provide immediate help to charities helping those most affected by Coronavirus. This was complemented by funds from the National Emergencies Trust. At the time of publication of this report, the Sussex Crisis Fund had given out £2.1m in grants across Sussex. Learn more on www.sussexgiving.org.uk

The Foundation thanks Horsham District Voluntary Sector Support and Healthwatch West Sussex for undertaking this research which will be invaluable in the next phase of the Sussex Crisis Fund. The voice of local communities must be central to all our work in the months to come.

Horsham District Voluntary Sector Support

The Voluntary Sector Support team works with charities, volunteers and community groups.

- We help new volunteers find opportunities
- We make it easy for groups to find volunteers
- We help new groups to get started
- We offer mentoring and peer support
- We run [events and training courses](#)
- We help keep you up to date with our fortnightly newsletter. [Subscribe to newsletter here.](#)

Email volunteering@horsham.gov.uk or call 01403 215191 to speak to a member of the team.



Talk to us

If you have questions about the content of this update, please either call 0300 012 0122 or email cheryl.berry@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

How this insight will be used?

We recognise that all health and care services are under pressure at this time and have had to adapt their ways of working. We will share this report with the local NHS, local Government and other providers to help them understand where things are working well and services are adapting to meet peoples' needs, and to help them identify any gaps.

For help, advice and information or to share your experience

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We're here to find out what matters to people and help make sure their views shape the support they need.

We also help people find the information they need about health, care and community and voluntary health and care support services in West Sussex.



Here to help you on the next step of your health and social care journey

We have the power to make sure that the Government and those in charge of services hear people's voices. As well as seeking the public's views ourselves, we also encourage services to involve people in decisions that affect them.



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