



Voluntary Action
Arun & Chichester

healthwatch
West Sussex

Voluntary Sector Response to COVID 19



Report collated and written by Voluntary Action Arun
and Chichester and Healthwatch West Sussex

June 2020

Executive Summary

The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Arun and Chichester responded quickly to the COVID 19 crisis and found new ways to provide support to local people. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of the VCS and the vital role of volunteering and community support. Organisations across the VCS have had to rapidly adjust how they operate to meet the needs of the people and communities they support, and a surge of additional demand arising from the crisis. The VCS is facing increasing pressure on its capacity with the need to provide more 1-2-1 based services, with reduced income and rising costs.

Demand for services provided by the VCS is increasing as health and social inequalities have been exacerbated by the crisis. As we begin to emerge from the lockdown, individuals and communities will have an urgent need for recovery and renewal. Many charities are fighting for their survival and those that do survive will be operating with severely reduced capacity to provide vital support. Loss of charities at this time will mean a loss of valuable preventative and sustaining independence support that is found within our communities.

Through the online Resilience Survey, we have learnt that 84% (37/44) organisations closed, but continued to provide valuable support, advice, information, and friendship to volunteers/service users/members many who were over 70 years and/or 'shielding'. Organisations have seen increases in demand and future inequalities especially debt, bereavement, mental health, dementia, carers, domestic violence, food poverty, unemployment and homelessness. The fast response of the VCS and its work with partners has reduced the pressure on statutory service provision and finances.

There is real concern about financial stability and solvency for all groups, especially those dependent on trading income and fundraising. Unrestricted funds have been used to pay bills such as rent, IT equipment and staff wages and there has not been any income generated due to the temporary closure. 40% of organisations anticipate they may cease trading within the next 3-6 months if they cannot open, fundraise or actively seek new funding opportunities. There is real concern that less funding will be available with cuts in local authority budgets, fewer community grants and donations and uncertainties surrounding income from Trusts and Foundation investments. Although the funds available for COVID 19 were welcomed they did not support general operational items.

The VCS has shown leadership, innovation, compassion and many organisations have remained active. Without a doubt the VCS is the unsung hero of the COVID 19 crisis, and we include in this the many thousands of people who have given to others in their community.



Introduction

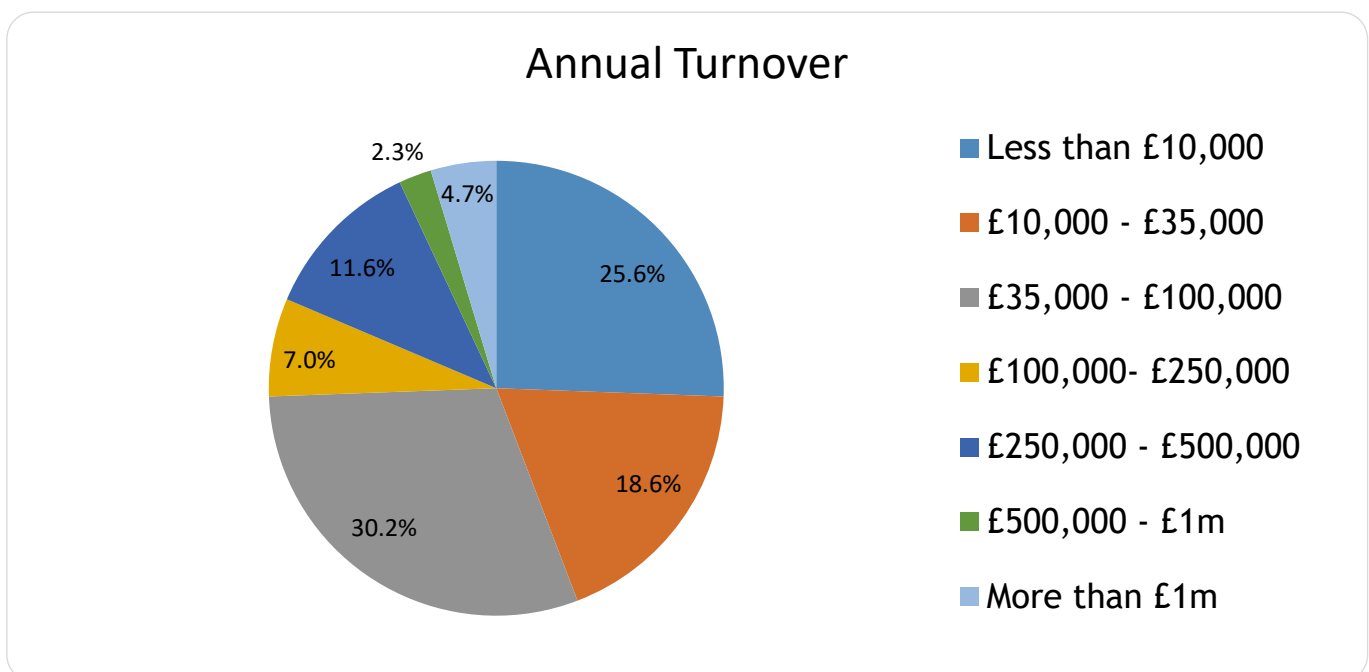
Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester (VAAC) and Healthwatch West Sussex (HWWS) are working collaboratively to gather information from VCS leaders about the impact of COVID 19 on their organisation; the challenges, concerns and future plans. The **learning** from this survey will help our [integrated care system](#) to be more responsive to the changing needs of communities as they navigate an uncertain future and define a new normal.

This report provides a snapshot of the views captured via our online Resilience Survey completed by 44 VCS organisations that provide services across the Arun and Chichester area. The survey was designed in conjunction with sector leaders and consisted of 21 questions to assess the impact of COVID 19 on service provision, staff, volunteers, service users, funding and forward planning. The survey was promoted through e-bulletins from VAAC and HWWS.

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

Resilience Survey findings

Over half the organisations who completed the survey were registered charities (52%) and were small to medium in size with an income of less than £100,000. Over half the organisations do not have full time staff. The range of income for these organisations is:



Service closure

84% of organisations (37/44) had to close all or part of their service provision, in line with government guidance. Closure of services has meant that a quarter of the organisations had to furlough staff.

“ Completely mothballed as all youth training ceased when higher education closed.
Had to close our charity clothes shop which also meant unable to take referrals for free clothes.
Shut down sports and the clubhouse. No income.
Not able to carry out face to face debt advice.

”

Changed service provision

During this time organisations have had to change quickly how they operate to meet the needs of their service users and local residents.

“ Setting up from scratch with absence of ground rules. The late involvement of district council coordination and finding we had more volunteers than people needing help.

”

Just under half (21) of the organisations changed from face to face service provision to virtual.

In addition, organisations have changed focus to respond to the immediate needs of their local community.

“ Run the local COVID support group with 140 new volunteers offering shopping, prescription pickups, provision of food, library activities, and supporting calls to 550 people.

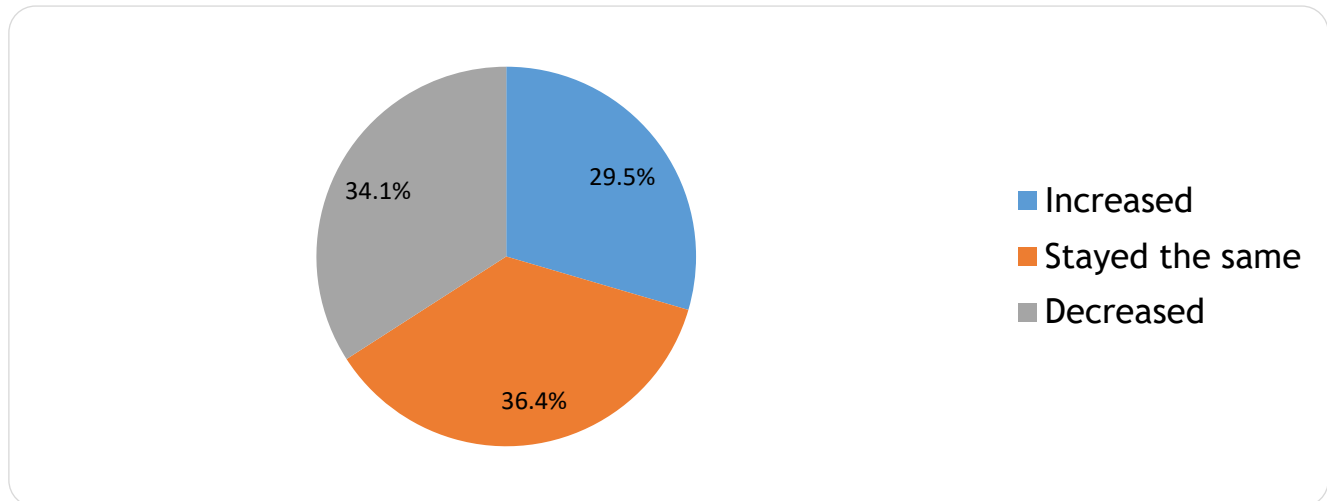
Staff are all working an extra day - volunteers can only be in a delivery team if they live in the same household - service users are having their food parcels delivered.

”



Changes in demand

Demand for services has changed and is changing within the context of a rapidly evolving situation. Organisations are predicting an increase in service delivery in areas such as debt, bereavements, mental health, dementia, voluntary carers support, domestic violence, food poverty, unemployment and homelessness.



Some organisations have completely changed their focus to meet the immediate needs of their local community, such as food shopping, picking up prescriptions and wellbeing calls for those experiencing loneliness.

“ Our members are unable to meet, and we are limited as to how we can interact with our community. We have reverted to using video conferencing and other online platforms. ”

Of the organisations that have seen an increase in service provision to date, it has in some cases been dramatic.

“ Our 233 volunteers have been astonishing in their support - phoning beneficiaries, delivering food, running online activities and raising money for the charity. ”

Foodbanks: resourcing stock earlier in the pandemic was a challenge due to panic buying. We are seeing a huge increase in need for the Foodbank. We are also needing to support local schools who are still having problems accessing the government vouchers for children who should be having free school meals.

Practical challenges

The practical challenges have been numerous:



We had to totally change the way we ran by providing a delivery service.

Unable to undertake nature conservation activity, so practical summer tasks - removal of invasive species and clearing of paths have not been carried out.

Learning to meet and work online and delivering services online rather than face to face.

Setting up laptops to access remote servers to enable home working.



Impact on Staff

COVID-19 has had a massive impact on staff, including those that have been furloughed. Staff have had to adjust to a new way of working. Working remotely has been welcome for some and the transition has gone smoothly for many, but a huge challenge for others, depending on their circumstances. The pressure of juggling: home, work, life balance, home schooling etc. has been really difficult. Many miss the office environment camaraderie and of *Trustees, volunteers and service users popping in*.

However, the loss of a daily structure is contributing to feelings of isolation, being alone, and lack of motivation is a real problem for some. Managers are maintaining regular contact by telephone to ensure good communication and support. Some have organised virtual social activities such as delivering live music sessions to maintain connection and communication.



Staff are feeling isolated working from home and relying upon their own technology, which is not always reliable. Tasks are taking longer.

Staff who are not furloughed are working above and beyond hours, due to increases in demand, and have had to get to grips with a whole new way of working in order to support our clients during this time.



Some organisations have seen an increase in demand which has **added extra pressure** on staff at this challenging time. One charity manager reported taking a cut in hours and pay. One organisation has a staff rota for coming into the office - due to social distancing guidance - so work is taking longer than normal. However, staff have shown extreme resilience during this crisis.



Many who are furloughed are uncertain as to their working future as there is potential for job losses, which is creating anxiety and instability within organisations. Management are keeping in regular contact to try to provide reassurance and are doing everything to ensure that a sustainable charity emerges once this crisis is over.

Impact on Volunteers

Just over a third (16) of organisations have services delivered completely by volunteers. The number of volunteers supporting organisations pre-COVID ranged from 1 to 233 active volunteers. This number has dropped to between 1-168 active volunteers. Some organisations have lost up to half their volunteers due to shielding or being over the age of 70. A recent [survey](#) by Independent Age *'found that 43% of people incorrectly believed that the government had instructed over-70s without any underlying health conditions to shield themselves by not leaving the house'*.

There has been a welcome increase in volunteers coming forward to help neighbours and residents. Active volunteers have been supporting for example: with shopping or prescription deliveries or befriending locally, this has meant a change in focus for some and has enabled them to remain actively involved in supporting people.

“Volunteers are even more important, and we have had some amazing support caring for the horses and the site.

We face closure. We are run by volunteers, who are not able to attend the venue as many are vulnerable or over the age of 70. The isolation for our volunteers and members has been a real endurance test and we fear many will not wish to return after lockdown.

”

Some volunteers are feeling frustrated at their inability to provide a service, and others are feeling disconnected and lack socialising with others. Organisations have expressed fear that several volunteers may not wish to return and face practical challenges of recruiting and training volunteers remotely. However, there have been many new volunteers reaching out to provide support to organisations.



Impact on Service Users/Members

The impact on service users/members has been hardest hit, as organisations have reduced services or closed. There is an increase in mental health issues across different client groups as they feel more isolated in the community than previously and complete isolation for those who live on their own.



Elderly service users with underlying health issues, are in the 'shielded' group, which further compounds their isolation. While some are coping with the situation, *others are prone to depression*. Therefore, numerous organisations are checking in with service users/members on a regular basis.

“Vulnerable people who have mental health problems. These are exacerbated by the pandemic and people need more support.”

We continued to communicate with all parents and have facilitated the passing of messages between parents who would otherwise not be able to communicate directly due to restrictions stated in court orders. We have been able to offer suggestions to parents on ways to keep in indirect contact with their child(ren) and facilitate the delivery of presents for a child's birthday.

Service users/members have opted to wait for face to face counselling to resume, as exploring difficult issues while in lockdown can sometimes be a step too far. However, service users/members who have engaged virtually have found the support at this challenging time invaluable.

“All we can do is to call our members over the phone, so that they do not feel forgotten, and to offer to shop for any items urgently required.”

Our members are almost all isolating/shielding at home, and we are doing our best to keep in contact with them and to get stuff that they need to them. We are working with the local Age UK's, with whom we share many service users. Our members have without a doubt become more isolated.

The emphasis has been about meeting the need of the service user/member. But organisations are predicting an increase in service delivery in areas such as debt, bereavements, mental health, dementia, voluntary carers support, domestic violence, food poverty, unemployment and homelessness. Concern was expressed as to *'who is supporting those too proud to ask for support'* now and in the future.



Technology

Organisations changed the way they work, connect and communicate with colleagues, volunteers and service user's technology has been a vital aid as well as being creative. Through increased IT infrastructures and upgrading has moved forward IT ambitions by 12-18 months. Staff have embraced the new technology, particularly Zoom.



Having to create our face to face courses online.

Moving from nearly 100% face to face learning to online learning and having to create the system, train staff and support students to access online learning from scratch.



Finance Impact

Respondents expressed real concerns about financial stability and solvency in the medium to longer term, as unrestricted funds have reduced since the closure, and includes; loss of membership fees, fundraising through events and sales, venue hire, closure of charity shops, rental, etc. Lockdown measure makes it unlikely things will change in the short-term, due to social distancing regulations, with increasing costs, and limiting numbers or not being able to open for service users/members and remote ways of working.

Even with services closed some organisations have still had to pay overheads and running costs which is depleting reserves. Some are asking for '*clear guidance from the Government as to when and how it will be safe to re-start activities.*'

Even with services closed organisations still have to pay overhead and running costs which depletes reserves. 40% (17) organisations feel that they may have to cease trading within the next three to six months, and all are extremely worried about finance and long-term survival.



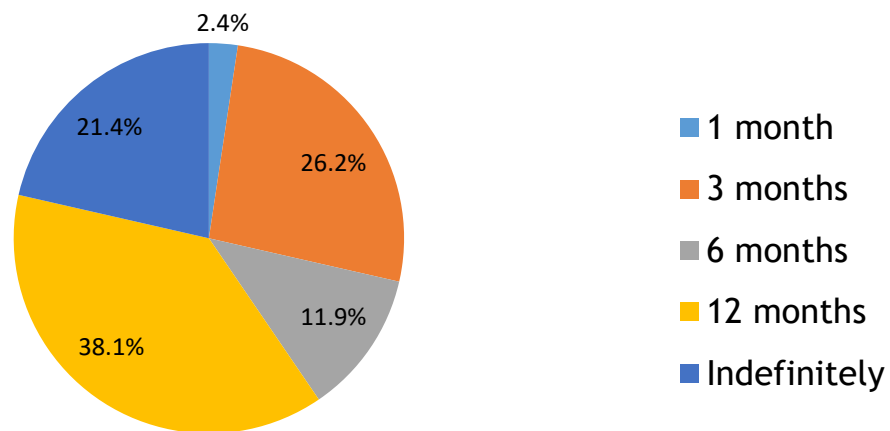
Struggle to pay staff as we come back into operation as all our reserves have been used on the ongoing costs associated with the project - horse care, site maintenance, rent etc.

Whole project runs on a shoestring, as long as we receive some sort of revenue to cover the rent, and associated business costs we can survive.

Running costs of venue hire will wipe out our reserves.



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



There is a loss of fundraising opportunity in the medium to long term, which will mean finances are very tight and there is concern that funders may pause funding because they are unable to deliver the expected service(s).

“Funds to support charitable activities are likely to be much reduced. We expect there to be much less "surplus" money around in Bognor Regis and with the possibility of increased taxes, higher unemployment and many other charities calling for support, there will not be enough to enable similar organisations to continue as in previous years.

Our income has dropped by two thirds and we are operating income-wise well below current levels and at a steady loss. This is not sustainable.

We have forecast a drop of £350,000 in income in the short-medium term.

We've closed everything - café, boats, operations and have no income coming in.

For some there are more practical expenses:

“We cannot produce goods to sell and have a £1000 rent to find.

High rental costs for office, and minibus disuse.

Annual insurance premiums will have to be paid.

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



We cannot produce goods to sell and have a £1000 rent to find.

There will be no income if we cannot fundraise.

Fundraising changed to home fundraising as no physical large-scale events.

All concerts and productions cancelled from May - July around 1000 people and a loss of £6k in income.



The anticipated impact in the medium to longer-term, will increase inequalities for service users/members especially if organisations close and a deeper than anticipated recession emerges.

Furlough Scheme

The furlough scheme has been appreciated by those who have used it, as it has helped to protect financial reserves but there are concerns around how fast services can be resumed and if they will earn enough to pay staff.



The 80% payment has enabled us to delay funding for later on in the year, vital to keep us going and plan for the future.

We are down by about 40% at present, if the furlough scheme stopped it will be closer to 70%.

Will struggle to pay furloughed staff, as we come back into operation as all our reserves have been used on the ongoing costs associated with the project - horse care, site maintenance, rent etc.



COVID 19 funding applications

Over half (57% or 25) of the organisations have made applications for COVID-19 funding to help mitigate the impact of the crisis, strengthen infrastructure, adapt to new ways of working or provide new services. The success rate of these range from £400 to £25,000.



The funding applications that have been successful are from:

Argus Fund	Leisure Fund
Arun District Council Business Support	Midhurst Council Fund
Clarion	National lottery Community Fund
Ferry Farm	Local Parish Councils
Good things Foundation	Sussex Community Foundation
Hampshire and Isle of Weight Community Foundation	Tesco bags for help
Kleinwort	Wave 105

It was reported that the Sussex Community Foundation and Arun District Council applications were *'very easy to complete.'* However, a number of organisations have been told that - *'funding is unavailable due to high demand, or not eligible as no charitable status.'* Also, a number are still waiting for a decision.

Future planning and risks to income

84 % (37) of the organisations have begun forward planning processes but this is difficult in the rapidly changing environment and with lots of future unknowns. Many organisations are worried about running out of money before they can begin fundraising again.

Some are concerned about cuts and non-renewable contracts in local authority budgets, NHS funding, less community grants, donations, and uncertainties surrounding income from Trusts and Foundations.

Some suggest that to be fully able to work collaboratively with others they need not to be in competition with one another. Also, **some form of information and advice for financial planning and coordination** would be helpful.



Some grants already paid may need to be partly returned as we have not been able to use all the monies as expected in the time allocated.

Funds to support our charitable activities are likely to be much reduced. We expect there to be much less "surplus" money around with the possibility of increased taxes, higher unemployment and many other charities calling for support.



Organisations will need time to rebuild provision again, and social distancing guidance will mean less service users/members can engage as previously, which will increase the cost of the service.

There is fear over the possible loss of charitable giving due to job losses, and as the anticipated economic recession begins to bite, but on the flipside increases and changes in demand for VCS are anticipated. However, core costs funding is needed to enable organisations to get *back on their feet* to pay staff and rebuild reserves.

“ Although we have been successful with some emergency funding and innovative with developing new services, we are operating income-wise well below current levels and at a steady loss. This is not sustainable. ”

Summary

It has been incredible how quickly the VCS responded to the COVID-19 crisis, with many organisations moving from primarily face to face services to telephone/virtual or have closed services but maintained wellbeing contact with service users/members. This is made particularly remarkable because resources are so much more limited for these organisations compared to other sectors.

The government’s stimulus package to help the UK economy deal with the COVID-19 emergency has provided a vital lifeline for many businesses and workers. However, much of this support *was designed for the private sector, despite being open to charities - included design features that would restrict the ability of charities to access the financial support they desperately needed.*

<https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2020/05/05/making-the-governments-covid-19-support-schemes-work-better-for-charities/>

The main area of focus is getting back into operation safely within the guidance, enabling service users/members to benefit from these services as previously. Support and guidance are needed in a number of areas: social distancing, online volunteering enabling the healthy over 70s to return, volunteer recruitment and training, fundraising and finance, online security to support smaller organisations, networking, partnership and promoting what organisations do is important.

Working out how to budget for the year ahead when fundraising activity cannot happen currently. There is concern about possible cuts in local authority budgets, reduced community grants, donations, and a reduction in available income generally when demand for services is increasing. This means a very real risk of permanent closure, which will leave support gaps for the most vulnerable.

The concern of the VCS is that the value, of what is often hidden support, will not be realised until it has gone, and peoples' lives have been negatively impacted.

Next Steps

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

Make recommendations to be shared with the VCS and public facing organisations.

Continue to listen to, monitor and analyse how VCS progress and adapt to help develop our own plans to proactively support the VCS.

Thank you

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

- Aldingbourne Trust
- Arts Dream Selsey
- Aruncare
- Arundel & Downland Community Leisure Trust
- Arundel Youth Club
- Aspire Sussex
- Bognor Regis Men's Shed
- Bognor Vineyard Church
- Chichester Child Contact Centre
- Chichester Conservation Volunteers
- Chichester Conservation Volunteers
- Chichester District Foodbank
- Chichester Forest Schools CIC
- Chichester Ship Canal Trust
- Christians Against Poverty
- Community Transport Sussex
- CONTACT 88
- Equine Partners CIC
- Felpham Emergency Resilience Group
- Fernhurst Recreation Ground Trust
- Frame of Mind CIC
- Fun and Breaks West Sussex
- Lifecentre
- Lions Club of Bognor Regis
- Littlehampton & District Foodbank
- Littlehampton and District Shed
- Making Theatre Gaining Skills CIC
- Manhood Wildlife & Heritage Group
- Owls about town
- PACSO
- Pregnancy Options Centre
- Relate North & South West Sussex
- Rotary Club of Chichester Harbour
- Rother Valley Together
- Selsey Community Forum
- St George's Church Donnington
- St Nicholas Church & Arundel Community Support Hub
- The Juno Project
- The Rotary Club of Bognor Regis
- The Sussex Snowdrop Trust
- Training4Work formerly Yet2Learn CIC
- Tuppenny Barn Education
- Waves Music Therapy CIC
- Workers Educational Association

We would also like to 'thank' Selsey Foodbank for the cover photograph.





Sussex
Community
Foundation

Sussex Community Foundation is a local charity that provides funding for grassroots charities and community groups across Sussex.

Sussex Community Foundation provides 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 which are 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 £1.2m in grants across Sussex.

The Foundation thanks VAAC and Healthwatch West Sussex for undertaking this survey 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.

Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester

Our role is to enable, support and promote VCS groups across Arun and Chichester. During this precarious time, we have undertaken a range of different activities to support our members.

1-1 Support for Member Organisations

We are here to support your individual situations covering all aspects of running your charity including governance, funding and volunteering. We will continue to do so through our referral system, by phone, email and zoom meetings. Please contact us by downloading our referral form from our [website](#) or emailing lucie.maldoom@vaac.org.uk

Funding

Our monthly e-newsletter, 'Funding Focus' highlights potential funding opportunities. We also put on Funding Surgeries, via Zoom, to give advice on a range of funding streams and how to apply.

Networking and Training Events

We regularly have events covering a range of subjects. Recently we held a CEO forum, a Volunteer Co-Ordinators Networking forum and a General Networking forum for members via Zoom.

Information

Stay up to date with our weekly e-bulletin that gives the latest information for the VCS. Check out our social media platforms and website below

Looking for volunteers?

If you would like to advertise for volunteers, please get in touch with Jenny.holmes@vaac.org.uk or go to our website to upload your information. <https://www.vaac.org.uk/volunteering>

Website: www.vaac.org.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/VAArunChi/

Twitter: www.twitter.com/VAAC_Community

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/vaac



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.



0300 012 0122



@healthwatchwestsussex



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