

Voluntary Sector Response to Covid-19



Voluntary and Community Sector organisations
voices from the Horsham District during the
Coronavirus pandemic - report 2

#BeMoreHumble

September 2020

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Executive Summary

The pandemic has impacted on all of our lives and life remains uncertain. The response of the Voluntary and Community Sector has amplified the compassion, care, and humanity of the sector and is valued by individuals and communities. The sector responded with speed and efficiency, redeploying and setting up remote ways of working for staff and their service provision, ensuring these new ways of working complied with appropriate Government guidance, policies, and procedures. Many of those organisations that ceased their usual activities, remained in contact with volunteers and service users.

What has been heard, loud and clear is that **finance** is needed urgently to ensure survival of many in this sector. Collaborative and resilient care systems and communities are better able to react and respond to the wider determinants of health and emergencies such as COVID-19. Without a doubt the pandemic has preyed on many pre-existing economic and social vulnerabilities affecting local communities, families, and individuals, increasing demand for voluntary and community services.

Next Steps and Recommendations

We aim to publish this report widely and ensure the information collated forms part of the pan-Sussex future reporting.



RECOMMENDATION

- Grant information needs to be clear, simple and a quicker process than currently, as it is taking too long to complete and time for a decision.
- Grants required for operational -day-to-day needs and not just future project work.
- Increased and ongoing partnership working between statutory organisations, local authority, and voluntary and community organisations.
- Increased provision of basic funding advice and training to support smaller/medium organisations or groups.
- Government COVID-19 guidance needs to be clearer so that it can be acted upon quickly, and if not available then local material should be produced.
- Basic promotions training for smaller/medium organisations or groups.

Introduction

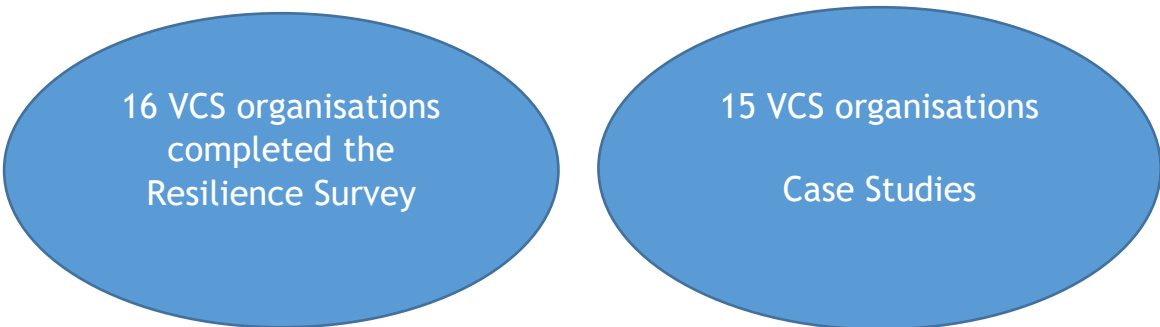
Horsham District Voluntary Sector Support, and Healthwatch West Sussex are working collaboratively to capture the COVID-19 experiences from voluntary and community organisations of their challenges, solutions, and future planning.

Our first report detailed the responses from our Online Resilience Survey completed by 16 organisations - click [here](#) to read the findings.

This report is drawn from 15 semi-structured conversations with voluntary organisations and community leaders', all providing services within Horsham District. The conversations - telephone and virtual - were conducted during July and early August. Our aim was to gain an understanding of the voluntary and community sector's experiences of working through this extraordinary time.

These conversations have been developed into Individual [Case Studies](#), which accompany this report to highlight how challenging the pandemic has been and how creative this sector has been, and continues to be, in response.

Our Resilience Survey and Case Studies provide a snapshot during a period of rapid change as the Lockdown measures were beginning to be eased. In total, this project has captured 31 voices from the voluntary sector in Horsham District.



16 VCS organisations
completed the
Resilience Survey

15 VCS organisations
Case Studies

Practical Challenges

The voluntary and community sector responded quickly and adapted to the COVID-19 crisis and Lockdown, moving from primarily face-to-face services to telephone, online platforms (such as Zoom) and social media -WhatsApp closed groups. A number of the organisations have provided frontline and essential services to support the crisis.



“All activities stopped - walking football, general gardening and Men’s Sheds. We set up a WhatsApp group and held a Zoom event every second week. This has been fantastic in keeping in touch with members.”



“16 telephone lines installed so that the helplines could be managed remotely. We moved to remote working and managing online chats, emails and call back services to support carers. Redeployed 59 of their 94 staff to the response lines, set-up business resilience meetings with team leaders and moved to a Business Recovery Plan all within four weeks of Lockdown.”



“We had to switch focus from taking potentially isolated people out and about, to getting essential things to those people.”



“Many of Age UK West Sussex, Brighton and Hove members needed to shield or self-isolate as they were over 70 and/or living with a long-term health condition. The charities centres and facilities had to close. The crisis service still responded within 24 hours. The charity began a huge push to support people with shopping and prescription collections, delivering to people’s doorsteps.”



Organisations with more vulnerable members (those who needed to shield, or self-isolate) service provision temporarily closed. Although services stopped, many organisations continued to remain in contact - *wellbeing support* by telephone and virtually, news bulletins, birthday cards, food, and medications deliveries etc.- with volunteers and members throughout the lockdown.



involve • enjoy • achieve

“We set up virtual Youth sessions, running three times a week and supported schoolwork and 1-2-1 virtual sessions on Facebook and Zoom. Some things were received better than others.”

Staff moved to working from home, many with newly purchased *laptops, mobile phones, and appropriate support and policies* in place. Some of the policies and procedures for working from home had to be quickly developed, to ensure that the move to virtual was swift and smooth. For some their *digital knowledge increased*, and plans have gone forwards by a few years.



“The garden space was opened in early June in Horsham as many families do not have access to a garden space.”

Leaders spoke about the blurring of work and personal life for managers, *part-time staff are working longer hours* and felt they should be ‘on call 24/7’. This was due for some to increases in demand and workload. Carers Support West Sussex informed that they instigated *wellbeing checks with staff, - have you taken a break, do you need to reduce your hours, it is ok, it is what is right for you. etc.* Which was exhausting for managers, but right for staff and volunteers.

The level of communication generally, increased massively with staff, volunteers, service users/members, partners, stakeholders, and general communications, in fact some people stated they are *Zoomed out*.



Impact on staff

Many staff have been furloughed, some had to shield or self-isolate, care for family members and others redeployed to crisis specific roles. But many staff missed the face-to-face contact, and are worried about the impact of COVID-19, with regards to their own safety, childcare needs, social distancing regulations for reopening centres and services etc.



“Many staff are parents and have childcare responsibilities and do not have a secure space at home to talk with service users by telephone - in fact some have used their cars to maintain confidentiality.”

relate
the relationship people

“We have heard that being locked down together as a family and then trying to discuss things is challenging. Many couples opted to call a temporary truce and simply focus on coping strategies during the Lockdown.”

Staff supervision and new ways of working has meant that extra structure was needed. Supervision by distance and in groups via Zoom was moved to every couple of days - but has been seen as positive - as the cases staff are dealing with and follow ups have become more complex.

Impact on Volunteers

Organisations lost the support of many of their volunteers immediately after Lockdown began. Many volunteers aged over 70 believed they needed to or had been told to shield or self-isolate. (A [survey](#) by Independent Age found 43% of the respondents were wrongly self-isolating). Those volunteers who were able to continue to support provided telephone *wellbeing calls* on a regular basis. Some organisations reported having volunteers not doing anything as the usual service provision closed down either fully or partially.

“

We are using IT a virtual club on Zoom.

Our Volunteers were not confident they had the right skills for working remotely but this changed with the right training and support.

”



All interviewees stated that staff need to be reassured before relaunching face-to-face services to ensure they are safe for their volunteers as well as service users/members.

Organisations have risk assessed and anticipated future demand and have or are in the process of, recruiting new volunteers to help with the expected increase. For others, COVID-19 presented a plateau in need, which was an ideal time to recruit more volunteers and offer training remotely.



Cruse Bereavement South *developed their volunteer online training as well as telephone training.*

Impact on Service-Users/Members

We were told that during the initial few weeks of the crisis, for many service users/members, their main concern was food shopping and medication collection. After some 20 weeks of Lockdown, this has changed to emotional issues.



It has been hard for service users as we have not been able to support as we would have liked, so the social aspects were lost, but we did point people in the direction of other services.

The Olive Tree Cancer Support Centre



The Phoenix Stroke Club
Supporting Stroke Survivors

“We have continued to support our members and their families and carers - by phone and virtually - as this is really important. For those who have difficulty speaking on the phone due to their stroke, we have been providing regular updates, newsletters and cards.”



Quotes from Phoenix Club members:

Your call is the one thing I look forward to each week.

Your contact means the world to me.

I have not felt alone even though I am alone.



For some organisations there has been a mixed response; initially there was an increase in demand, but some people have **not** taken to virtual ways of working and decided to join the waiting list for face-to-face.

The speedy move to digital-based provision of services has offered flexibility and extended reach to more people but, is challenging for some. It is important that voluntary and community organisations review their IT needs to ensure it is accessible for every service user/member including '*communication needs*' post COVID-19.



4Sight Vision Support suggested that as we move forward, post COVID-19, to a more digital based operation, we need to bring people together to ensure every one of our members can engage.

Financial impact

All the voluntary and community leaders we spoke to had real concerns about financial stability, solvency, and long-term survival. Especially, as unrestricted funds have been so dramatically reduced due to temporary closure - loss of cashflow from activities, meals, membership fees, paid services, fundraising opportunities, venue hire, closure of charity shops, rental funds and so on - and monies spent on enabling new ways of working.

Relate North and South West Sussex informed that **60% of their funding comes from client income, 30% from the charity shop and 10% from other grants and funding.** The Lockdown has meant that **90% of income has been cut off.**

Many of these income areas are unlikely to change in the foreseeable future due to social distancing rules and reduced numbers, increased costs of operations to comply with Government guidance and alternative ways of working.



"We have lost our paid work, so our income has dried up by a quarter. We do not do any large fundraising and have no charity shops. There is still the rent to pay on the office space that cannot currently be used, and staff overheads and we are using our reserves."



"As the Horsham Centre is new, we are being funded by the Crawley Centre until we are able to be self-sufficient with our own fundraising. We do need to fundraise for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other things not budgeted for prior to COVID-19."



Voluntary and community organisations expressed concern about possible cuts in County Council budgets, fewer community grants, and donations, and uncertainties surrounding income from Trusts and Foundations. **Once the crisis has passed will there be enough funding for the increases in demand?**

A high number of organisations closed, and furloughing staff helped protect financial reserves. Many organisations have seen an increase in demand and staff have been redeployed to support. Voluntary and community organisations are **incredibly grateful for the furlough scheme** and staff have appreciated it.

“

We lost around 35% of our income. So, needed to protect contracts and continued to support keyworkers and vulnerable children to school or staff to vulnerable people. We retained all of our staff but, 65% were furloughed.

Community Transport Sussex

”



“We have seen a huge increase in demand and that is down to people losing their jobs (as the furlough scheme came to an end) and using the food bank for the first time.”

A number of organisations stated they had just sorted out their budget for the year and had challenging targets already, then fundraising activity stopped. **As the crisis begins to ease, we will revisit our fundraising strategy.**

“

We have diversified our funding and now have variable income streams but need to pay for insurance and pension contributions as these are not moveable.

Springboard

”

Organisations stated they are running services as cost-effectively as possible and trustees are meeting virtually for some **week-by-week** to ensure the organisation does not need to close.

Fundraising Activity

Fundraising activities have been hit hard, in particular groups providing one-to-one services and/or are dependent on trading income and large-scale fundraising events. Cruse Bereavement South informed that they are not a commissioned service and are not able to fundraise fully at present. They were successful in gaining funding from the Clinical Commissioning Group and Sussex Community Foundation to fund the new ways of working and training for their volunteers.

Fundraising losses tend to top up reserves and this loss is not coming from anywhere else.



We are losing around £30k per month from subscriptions, café, venue hire, paying rent and not using it.



Where the fundraising team is not working - as many have been furloughed - they are thinking of new ways to raise finance. The Phoenix Stroke Club held a Zoom fundraiser. We used to get funds from people dropping change into a bucket but even this has now gone.

Contracts and Grants

We were informed that a number of organisations have had to put planned projects on hold, and some were able to be paused or extended. We are taking our commissioners with us as people are still getting a good service.

Sussex Clubs for Young People informed that they rely heavily on contracts and have agreed an extra month extension to contracts because of COVID-19.

Some organisations with funding in place are concerned they cannot meet the agreed outcomes for the contract and grant conditions, a volunteer training project they anticipate will be down on numbers.

Initially, general grants closed and became COVID-19 ones. Those who applied for these grants have experienced mixed results which makes future planning difficult. Applied for the Business Rate, Discretionary Top up, Sussex Community Foundation for grants and have been successful in securing funds. But waiting to hear from the Lottery Community Fund.

Organisations reported that the process for applying for various grants and funding was *lengthy and time consuming*. Streetlight UK informed that the COVID-19 grant requirements were narrower than previously and do not apply to day-to-day operation. Applying for these can be lengthy and time consuming.

“

We accessed 2 emergency funds which have kept us afloat.

Sussex Community Foundation have been great for support as have the Henry Smith Charity.

Grants have been ring-fenced for the project and not for operational costs.

”

Many grants are for the provision of projects not day-to-day operational provision as telephone calls aren't sexy yet take the pressure off the local council and other organisations.

“

We need day to day running costs and not projects as we still have the maintenance of the pitches etc, repairs, insurance, licence fees, water, and electricity costs.

”

A number anticipate that the local authority is going to have to make cuts in the *softer* things. During the pandemic the voluntary and community organisations could have closed totally but instead were inventive and changed how they worked.

Forward Planning

We were told that many organisations had to revise budgets to remove a proportion of the lost fundraising and have not ruled out restructuring, redundancies, and different ways of working.

Carers Support West Sussex, and 4Sight Vision Support used the ACEVO self-assessment resilience tool to plan for the next three months but are not assuming that everything will go back to how it was before COVID-19.

(<https://www.acevo.org.uk/>)

Many organisations had contingency/ emergency plans; some had no budget attached - a learning point for the future.



“The biggest impact has been on service users and they need to map how the first phase has gone - food, medications - and the here and now - calmer stage - so that they know what the ebb and flow is to respond appropriately.”

Those organisations which are part of nationally based organisations, for example Age UK Horsham have been able to access some funding from national appeals such as the Big Night Out.

Some of the future challenges include

- Information Technology (IT), which has enabled voluntary and community organisations to widen their service provision to reach more and new people than previously. Moving staff to home working and IT was an ambition for the future now realised for some. This means office spaces may not be needed, or the space reallocated to other activities or closed.
- There is concern about the *Government guidance* as for certain settings it is blurred, for example *Special Schools, Autism, and PPE*.

“It has not been easy and needed a lot of contact with West Sussex County Council, then it changes, and you have to start all over again.” One asked “are things different for Day Care than for a Care Home?”

- Access to appropriate PPE is a barrier to service provision restarting.
- The impact of the current *Social Distancing* rules is a major barrier to restarting many face-to-face services. “How do we comply with social distancing in a care environment and meet social purpose?”
- The anticipated second spike in COVID-19 and the ripple effect of this.



The voluntary and community sector has provided excellent services that wrap around statutory services and have prevented deaths. It is so important people realise how vital that role is.

Age UK West Sussex, Brighton and Hove



Partnerships

A number of voluntary and community organisations have experienced partnerships working between statutory and local authority and this sector, with better communication links and smaller organisations not being overlooked - as this does more for the local communities.

“

We work with partner agencies including the police and have a good system in place.

”

Increased needs

COVID-19 has highlighted and exacerbated many areas already fragile for health and social systems:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Children and Young People | <p>They have lost the rhythm of education as well as peer friendships, teachers and educational support and need to return to some form of normality.</p> <p>For some school is a relief from the home situation which may have been magnified by the Lockdown. They have lost the option of ‘getting things off their chest’ with friends.</p> |
| Low Income families | <p>Many families have been affected by job losses and this may be the first time they have found themselves in this situation and feel they cannot discuss how it impacts on their lives.</p> <p><i>The impact of Universal Credit</i> and benefit payments being capped for a number of years now.</p> <p>Families on low income may live in a smaller space and have no access to IT/laptops/mobile phones.</p> |
| Job losses | <p>The <i>impact of job losses on communities</i> and the economy generally within Crawley and Gatwick could be significant and this area is less likely to recover quickly. How can the voluntary and community services ensure that the right level of resources - money, provision of support, commissioning - whilst protecting the wider sector?</p> |

Mental Health

MIND West Sussex informed that they did not see an increase in demand during Lockdown, due to people finding their own ways of coping or not reaching out for support as they would usually.

However, many organisations reported that service users are struggling. Self-harm has increased as has stress and anxiety.

- Increases in alcohol as home from prison and not being supported, so end up back on the streets, increased mental health issues due to pressures at home, and sofa surfers being kicked out on to the streets due to all of the family being at home.
- Many feel isolated, and alone as they have not been going out over the past few months and need some form of exercise as they have lost muscle tone and wastage due to the lockdown.

Carers

The *mental health of carers* has not been recognised and they have become invisible.

Age UK West Sussex, Brighton and Hove informed that *without their usual support systems during Lockdown carers were left unaided 24/7 which put huge pressure on some.*

Many families are facing challenging issues and stress levels are extremely high, *wellbeing is so important and should not be an easy target to be removed.*

Bereavement

The emotional impact of *bereavement*, *not being able to say goodbye, where maybe the last time you saw a loved one was in the back of an ambulance and families have not been able to visit in hospital or attend the funeral.*

The normal grieving processes for families are on hold and people are in survival mode, doing daily things and waiting for Lockdown to end.

Given that one death affects six people on average there are a lot of people struggling at the moment and in the future. In some ways, *one can prepare for an expected death but when figures are reaching 900+ a day, it's a community challenge as well as an individual one.*

Personal Protective Equipment

Access to PPE is a challenge for most voluntary and community organisations going forward, to enable groups to re-open, provide transport, carry out projects, as well as carers, as examples. It is not just availability but also the extra unplanned cost.

Springboard informed that *children will not react well to PPE. It could make them scared of people. It is important for young children and those with additional needs to see people's faces and mouths for their wellbeing and development.*

Domestic
Violence and
Safeguarding

There has been an increase in telephone calls which have become more complex.

New Volunteers

A number of organisations reported that they will be recruiting new volunteers as they have lost volunteers due to COVID-19. A high number of volunteers [feel afraid to return to roles](#), due to age, illness, or family concerns. Applications have been received during the Lockdown which are beginning to be reviewed.

Cruse Bereavement South informed that [they are expecting a surge this Summer and have taken advantage of time to recruit more volunteers](#). They have developed online and telephone training to support.

Summary

In summary, this is a snapshot in time, of the experiences of voluntary and community leaders as they have worked and lived through the COVID-19 Lockdown. It details organisations leadership, innovation, and compassion as although service provision may have stopped their usual activities, for many others, there has been increases in demand, and most have remained in active contact with volunteers, service users/members to give advice and support. This has reduced the impact on statutory services during this time and needs to be acknowledged.

Financial stability is urgently needed for all groups, especially those who depend on a trading income and fundraising. There is an urgent need for statutory partnerships to be developed as community groups are the bedrock of NHS and local authority initiatives such as [social prescribing](#).

The grants and tender processes need to be easier, quicker, and more flexible to cover day-to-day running as well as project work.

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted and exacerbated inequalities and increases in demand is bubbling towards the surface as the lockdown eases. The loss of just one voluntary or community organisation may leave a void that is not easily filled by others. The consequences being that peoples' health and wellbeing worsens, with the potential being they become increased users, of statutory services.

However, there was little evidence that smaller to medium sized groups are actively self-promoting their service provision and maybe this is another area for review.

It is recognised this is a small sample size to be regarded as statistically significant but, when combined with our Resilience Survey report, and previous survey's and evidence from Horsham District Voluntary Sector Support it does provide an indication of where effort is needed in the short to medium term to best support this sector.

Thank you

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have given generously of their time for this project.

Ben Burt, CEO, Springboard Horsham

Emma Elnaugh, CEO, Horsham Matters

Helen Gibbs, Trustee, The Horsham and Shipley Community Project

Helena Croft, CEO, Streetlights UK

Jo Bell, Horsham District Team Manager, Sussex Clubs for Young People

Jo Clark, Director of Partnerships and Localities, Age UK Horsham District

Kerrin Page, Deputy CEO and Head of Operations, MIND West Sussex

Lisa Phillips, Centre Manager, Relate Sussex (Horsham)

Mandy Jones, Manager, Phoenix Stroke Club

Marilyn Drury, Horsham Centre Manager, The Olive Tree Cancer Support

Matt Roberts, CEO, Community Transport Sussex

Nick Handley, Service Co-ordinator, West Sussex Mediation Service

Nik Demetriades, CEO, 4Sight Vision Support

Sonia Mangan, CEO, Carers Support West Sussex

Ted Hill, Hub Manager, Cruse Bereavement South

Horsham 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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