



How a Community Organisation Adapted During the COVID-19 Crisis

August 2020

By working with our colleagues in the Voluntary and Community sector, we have a series of reports on our website that capture the experiences and issues from the point of view of services and groups that support local people in the community.

This is an independent case study showing an example of one community organisation's story of adapting and what the future holds.

About the organisation



Streetlight UK offers fresh choices to women involved in prostitution, sexual exploitation and sex trafficking.

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We provide specialised support services for women involved in prostitution across Sussex, Surrey and London. We support women and help them overcome the challenges that limit their choices: such as the lack of education, training and employment opportunities as well as the physical and emotional barriers before them.

Helena Croft Director Streetlight UK

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What were the immediate challenges?

Streetlight UK's challenges were similar to other organisations, as they were prevented from conducting outreach and 1-2-1 support with vulnerable women they help. This affected all three areas they operate in - Sussex, Surrey and London.

It took Streetlight UK just three weeks to get into a safe position to restart their operation, ensuring that the staff could operate within a safe system.

With the inability to use the desk-based IT equipment used in the office, Streetlight UK had to purchase laptops for home use, to enable the organisation to function effectively. Due to many staff members being parents with childcare responsibilities, no home environment was safe and secure to talk to service users, resulting in calls taking place in their cars to maintain confidentiality.

It was a stressful time and finding a balance of what works under these unusual circumstances.



Staff support has increased with communication and stronger and more regular contacts. Zoom meetings take longer and staff are able to access training and webinars etc. as with partner organisations. We work with other organisations for external staff supervision, which must be robust.



Due to COVID-19, Streetlight UK lost a lot of their *volunteers* nearly immediately after lockdown was declared. However, some did remain and further volunteer applications were received during the pandemic. The volunteers have adapted the way that they operate, focusing on raising online awareness. It is only recently that the volunteers have been able to go back to their normal activities, for example, working alongside the Police and attending outreach support sessions.

The *service users* have faced the most difficult challenges and their vulnerability has been increasingly heightened as a result of COVID-19. This especially vulnerable group has seen major increases in mental health illnesses, drug and substance abuse, homelessness, domestic violence, rape, and suicide attempts. Those who were not eligible for housing did get some help, which was positive, but many lost the ability to work and as a result lost income which paid for their food etc.

Streetlight UK was able to help service users in providing some with food throughout the lockdown, *something they have never done before and are now continuing to do*. They have also provided women with mobile phones, enabling them to stay connected. Additionally, some service users who were already deciding to exit prostitution, their progress and decision on exiting has been accelerated due to COVID-19.

How has COVID-19 affected their finances?

There were two reasons why Streetlight UK did not have to furlough staff. Firstly, staff are self-employed and did not qualify for furlough. Secondly, three weeks into the crisis, the organisation became an emergency service and moved to contingency planning to meet women, using partner organisations offices, the parks etc. These meetings took place following the COVID-19 government guidance.

As the workload increased, they had less time for applications for grants and tenders, *as the process for applying for these can be lengthy and time consuming*. The COVID-19 specific grant requirements were narrower than previously or did not apply to the day-to-day operation.

Unfortunately, Streetlight UK lost a £10,000 income. But, thankfully, they received some of this lost income back through a grant.-They lost income from training, as the grant only covered Streetlight UK to the end of June. This means that they are unable to operate at full capacity. *Yet their reach and referrals have doubled from agency and self-referrals in all areas.*

“ Streetlight UK is yet to see the long-term financial impact COVID-19 will have on the organisation Yet, they are starting to see the short-term impacts from the cancellation of events that were planned to take place. As a result, Streetlight UK has doubled its outreach in the three areas it operates in.

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They anticipate being stable for the next 12 months. As smaller grants tend to be for 12 months, they need access to longer term grants. However, *this all takes time to complete and is an additional pressure*.

The difficulty in finding funding to ensure Streetlight UK can remain running and operating in the longer-term and future has forced them to find and explore different avenues of finance.

They have begun forward planning, but it is challenging because of the financial situation.

What are the concerns for the future, post COVID-19?

It is known that there is an increase in relationship breakdowns in the home, due to the pressure of the whole family being present. There is also an increase in alcohol consumption as those who return from prison are not effectively supported, causing them to end up back on the streets. Furthermore, there is an increase in mental health issues, consequential to the lack of money and pressures at home, causing those who have been kicked out due to the family all being at home to become sofa surfers. Domestic violence is another area that has increased from explosive relationships, as well as assaults and rapes. To support and assist these concerns, Streetlight UK ensures they have an effective partnership in place with our partner agencies, including the Police

Contact details

To learn more about Street Light, call **07546 588449**

Or visit their webpage <https://www.streetlight.uk.com/>



Horsham Voluntary Sector Support

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

They:

- help new volunteers find opportunities
- make it easy for groups to find volunteers
- help new groups to get started
- offer mentoring and peer support
- run [events and training courses](#)
- 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.

We have a simple ambition at Healthwatch West Sussex...
to make local health and social care services better for
people that use them.



We are here to listen, take action and influence positive change for local people living in West Sussex.

We record what people tell us and share this anonymously with those who make decisions about our health and care services.

You can contact us in several ways:



Telephone - 0300 012 0122



Email - helpdesk@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk



Website - www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

You can also follow our social media channels to always be updated with the latest in health and social care news across West Sussex: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#).

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

