



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

Springboard

Springboard's vision is a world of equality where all disabled children, young people and their families are able to reach their full potential.

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Springboard supports disabled children, young people and their families. As a charity we provide two main services: the first is for families with young children who can access affordable and accessible play facilities through our inclusive stay and play in our centre. The second is a programme of activities and support for children and young people with additional needs during evenings, weekends and holidays which gives parents care respite.

Ben Burt, Chief Executive Officer, Springboard Horsham

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What were the immediate challenges?

Springboard's play centre closed on the 17th March and this is not something that can be transferred to online. Some of the work has been transferred to online or virtual such as a listing of resources, activities that can be '*dipped in and dipped out*' type of approach, as well as Facebook and Youtube activity sessions.

Staff have been providing welfare calls to parents to 'check in' and see if all is ok, as their work supports the whole family. The garden space was opened in early June in Horsham - *as many families do not have access to a garden space* - to play football and use the equipment. The garden space was opened on a household by household basis and this was helpful to parents and staff - *to see people and check in*. Social distancing is an issue for small children as well as children and young people with disabilities so using mainstream parks may not have been appropriate, also some children we work with can have a tendency to *run off or abscond*, as our garden is secure this gave parent carers piece of mind.



Before COVID-19 we had never before used Zoom or had activities online or virtual. The lockdown forced us to do this.



The Government guidance has become clearer for certain settings but is still blurred for this sector, and staff have to ask *does this apply to us?* What is needed is specific guidance for *settings that work with those with additional needs* that is clear.

Throughout the crisis there has been no specific guidance for those with additional needs, other than SEND schools guidance which does not necessarily apply.



Children will not react well to personal protective equipment (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.



Guidance has not been easy and staff have needed a lot of contact with West Sussex County Council and Public Health to clarify. What is needed is *someone to check the guidance daily* and this is difficult and near impossible for a small charity to achieve.

Springboard Trustees have all had to work remotely and have been able to be part of the organisations as much as they may want, as they or family members have been shielding. Springboard also have a number of young volunteers - under 20 years, who are usually recruited through schools, so maintaining contact with them has been challenging, they have also suffered from their own anxieties in relation to COVID-19.

How has Covid-19 affected their finances?

Springboard supports 500-600 families annually and this helps to reduce hospital admissions, GP appointments and saves costs and demand in these and other areas.



They have some money coming in to run the services but not enough to run at the level before closure, this will provide some breathing space in the short term. Being unable to fundraise, and lost revenue from venue hire has had a major impact.

They have a staff team of 15 FTE (28 members), made up of a mixture of full time, part time, permanent, fixed term and zero-hour contracts. Springboard have paid the top up 20% until the end of June from reserves for those that have been furloughed (all but 5 members of the team). The remaining five staff members have been working providing welfare calls and virtual work. *The furlough challenge was that staff could not support the business but could support other business.*

The organisation aim is to work with the whole family, but capacity was limited, the funds available cover staff costs through the local authority contract and regular grants. Even this had to be questioned financially -how much will this service cost due to reduced numbers *as well as, can we do this, do we and should we.* We would have liked to have been able to provide more support but do not have the financial capacity.

Income has been lost but they have been successful in securing some funding from Tesco, Sussex Community Foundation - this enabled the opening of the garden space with added capacity. They applied for funding to enhance the IT equipment from the local authority and Children in Need. What is needed is *basic running cost funding and support for planning and coordination*, which would be a huge relief.



Zoom licence and 20-hour operational support and supervision, plus core costs for insurance and bills is not sexy for grants. But necessary to keep going.



There is a huge risk funding wise going forwards, with extra costs such as PPE and extra cleaning and so on to comply with Government guidance and safety.

They have diversified their funding and now have variable income streams but need to pay for insurance, and pension contributions as these are not movable. There is an urgent need for grant funding for day to day running of the services and not just project work.

How have they begun to Forward Plan?

Springboard know that if they do not begin forward planning, it could be costly. The organisation needs to restart the *face to face* services following the Government guidance and duty of care. As there is no substitute for face to face as you pick up more than through virtual - *stress, anxiety and other warning signs.*



The repercussions of COVID-19 loss of income - as venue hire stopped overnight and from grants - as many moved to COVID-19 specific grants. They are trying to forward plan 12-18 months but are finding that this needs to be split into blocks 3-6 months, 6-12 months, 12-15, months and 15-18 months.

Recession or no recession money is not flowing into social care services, yet this can help to address some of the inequalities but is a poor relation. Given that 1:20 have a child/adult with disabilities and will need extra support more funding will be required not less.

They are reviewing future needs for volunteers and may need to recruit and retrain.

“Sussex Community Foundation have been really helpful to us and supportive.”

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

The social workers have been going into homes so that families have some support, and most have coped really well and one or two not so well. The quality of the conversations is lacking.

The challenge of safety issues some have over compensated - *they do not need to leave the home and do not have to cope with life, back to school and work*. There is a loss of skills to ensure behaviours change and full independence to go into supportive living for example that will not become apparent for a few years yet.

Rebuilding confidence skills and re-engaging into society is needed. Springboard structure provides a wraparound service to enable this to happen.

There are concerns as post COVID-19 college work, transition period and so on. One hopes that the wider system learns from the COVID-19 experience, as there was poor co-ordination and a very reactive response at first. They contacted a lot of community groups to help and received no response, yet collaboration from similar organisations facilitated by the local authority has been excellent.

Contact details

To learn more about this organisation visit their website
<https://springboardsupport.org/>

Email: hello@springboardproject.com



Horsham Voluntary Sector Support

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

They:

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- make it easy for groups to find volunteers
- help new groups to get started
- offer mentoring and peer support
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Email - helpdesk@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk



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How a voluntary organisation has adapted during COVID-19 - Case Study

