

How a Community Organisation Adapted During the COVID-19 Crisis

September 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



Age UK East Grinstead & District works with people aged 50+ to make a positive difference to their wellbeing and quality of life.

“ We deliver a variety of activities designed for older people: armchair exercises, Tai-Chi, Zumba, swimming and Pilates. We also provide a Lunch Club, Day Breaks (Dementia service for carers), outreach support, holidays, outings and trips to encourage independent living and reduce loneliness.

Barry Gilbert, Chief Operations Manager ”

What were the immediate challenges?

Age UK East Grinstead & District had to set up from scratch its 'phone befriending' service - this is where a trained volunteer has a list of people to phone each week. Initially the conversation was around access to food and medications. We have continued this service throughout the crisis. We are also a member of the East Grinstead Emergency Action Group.

“ We are making around 56 calls a day, this has reduced now to around 40 calls a day but the calls are taking longer.



The main impact for volunteers has been that many of them are aged over 70 and needed to shield or self-isolate due to health reasons or family. These volunteers were added to their wellbeing phone listing. They retained a hard core of around 15-20 people who supported the telephone service.

They had to furlough nine of their 13 staff and move to remote working. Their Dementia Project Lead has remained in contact with carers and calls them regularly as they *“are more like friends than clients.”*

How has Covid-19 affected their finances?

Age UK East Grinstead & District had to close their centre. This meant a loss of cash flow from activities, meals and room hire. The furlough scheme has been very helpful, but they now need ways to bring in cash as the scheme changes.

Age UK East Grinstead & District is part of a national organisation and they have received funding from appeals such as the *Big Night Out* schemes. They have also applied for various grants. Age UK is a UK brand and well respected, but each Age UK group is a separate unit with their own Trustees, policies, procedures and funding.

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 specific grants are for non-virtual contact with people, so they have not been eligible.

“ I guess telephone calls are not considered “sexy” from a media view but are most important and have taken the pressure off the local council and other

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How have they begun to forward plan?

They have begun forward planning to understand what is required to re-open the centre in line with social distancing guidance. A one-way system will be difficult but possible to put in place. This also means considering issues relating to the age and frailty of members and correct distancing. Those who rent room space also have vulnerable people. In reality it may be one of the later places to re-open maybe in October, if there is not a second spike.

However, they are working on a plan to deliver hot meals to people’s homes within the area *“as many people do not have a hot meal or are paying a lot for one.”*

They are planning to set up a home delivery service and food boxes, starting small and if successful, to grow. So far they have 50+ members interested in this project. It would provide a much welcome funding stream to keep the cash flowing as they still have to pay for the overheads of the building and staff salaries.

“ It is a bit like the photographs we have in the centre from the 1950s of delivering Meals on Wheels from the back of someone’s car. ”

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

The organisation’s main concerns are finance and challenges connected to social distancing to re-opening the center.

There are also concerns about transport, especially assisted transport, as many members would struggle getting on and off buses/cars without help.

Contact details

To learn more about Age UK East Grinstead & District

Email eng@ageukeastgrinstead.org.uk

Or Telephone 01342 327046



Supporting community action across Mid Sussex

During this time of uncertainty, we have undertaken a range of different activities to support our members.

General Enquiries: 01444 258102

Learn more from our website: <http://www.msva.org.uk/>

Admin Hub: Delmon House, 36-38 Church Road, Burgess Hill, RH15 9AE

Registered charity number: 1158780



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to make local health and social care services better for
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in West Sussex.

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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

