

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

Community Transport Sussex, operates across the county as

- Bluebird Community Transport (Mid Sussex)
- Horsham District Community Transport
- Crawley Community Transport
- Henfield Community Bus
- East Grinstead Dial-a-Ride and the Hurst & Hassocks Community Bus



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As a charity our aim is to help local people who struggle to access public transport due to age, disability, or because there is a lack of safe or adequate public services in their area.

Matt Robert CEO Community Transport Sussex

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What were the immediate challenges?

During the pandemic Community Transport Sussex had to switch focus from taking potentially isolated people out and about to getting essential things to those people. 27 of their 30 volunteers needed to shield due to age and health concerns.

The organisation also manages Dial-a-Ride Southern Services in Adur & Worthing and liaised with the *WSCC Community Hub to help with the delivery of food parcels, the collection of prescriptions and delivery of Personal Protective Equipment*. Community Transport Sussex offered support to the COVID-19 Community Support Groups for *members to get essential medical appointments and other non-emergency journeys*.

It continued to provide *Special Educational Needs home to school transport for the children of key workers and the most vulnerable children* throughout lockdown as well as support other smaller Community Transport groups with up-to-date Government guidance on transport issues.

Community Transport Sussex has been in communication with Age UK West Sussex & Brighton and Hove and Age UK Horsham District to assist with the delivery of emergency food parcels and explore ways to help Age UK get services up and running as we all come out of this crisis.

How has COVID affected their finances?

Community Transport Sussex lost around 35% of its income so needed to protect contracts and continued to support keyworkers and transport vulnerable children to school or staff to vulnerable people. They retained all staff but 65% were furloughed. Only six staff have contracted hours, and most are on zero contracts - something they prefer as it provides flexibility. They were also engaged in taking essential supplies to people - parcels, food donations, food parcels, prescriptions etc in Horsham.

“Community Transport Sussex also scheduled *‘ringing vulnerable people’* but were not needed as much as the ‘community groups’ which sprang up looking after those shielding and self-isolating.

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The organisation has applied for a number of grants such as Sussex Community Foundation after attending a Voluntary Funding event which was *very helpful and useful as it put faces to names and helped reconnect with other local groups.*

How have they begun to forward plan?

Community Transport Sussex will soon be starting to operate a semi-scheduled shopping service in all areas, so that those who wish to venture out can do so in the safest way possible. *Some people are desperate to get out to the shops etc., but some are very nervous about going out at all.*

Its members are mostly older people and those with disabilities who may have been some of the most isolated of all during lockdown. Their focus over the coming months will be to provide a much-needed service and to ensure the passengers are completely happy that they are safe and looked after.

Community Transport Sussex hopes that this service will gradually increase to a point where they can fully introduce Dial-a-Ride, although vehicle capacity is likely to be reduced for some time due to social distancing.

“ They have continued to provide a ‘**Supportive Assisted Transport**’ *where the person is assisted to and from the car etc and is safely taken to where they need to go and back.* ”

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

Finance, as there will be a gap in funding since they are unable to provide group hire and excursions, as they *may not be financially viable due to social distancing - a driver and vehicle and only six people will be expensive.* They may need to find a new financial model. There is also the need to retrofit vehicles to support social distancing guidance and to run safely, which needs to be funded.

“ Forward planning using ‘mind maps’ and keeping in connect with other transport groups, our aim is to provide *local transport that works and is easy to fund.* ”

Contact details

To learn more about Sussex Community Transport Contact:

www.ctsussex.org.uk or telephone 01444 471919



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

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