

# 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

Sussex  
**OAKLEAF**  
[www.sussexoakleaf.org.uk](http://www.sussexoakleaf.org.uk)



Currently provide a range of support services to people with mental health needs, those with a personality disorder, and individuals at risk of homelessness.



We aim to empower people and promote independence by providing recovery-focused community wellbeing services, residential care, peer mentoring, housing support and volunteering opportunities.

*Dudley Edwards Sussex Oakleaf*



## What were the immediate challenges?

Sussex Oakleaf have continued to provide all services in a reduced form throughout the crisis. All face-to-face services stopped, instead they provided telephone and shopping support. All staff moved to home working and set up well attended Zoom groups.



Our digital knowledge has increased and gone forwards by a few years.



Sussex Oakleaf lost two new employees as they were part of the community team and could not be furloughed. All other staff were redeployed, as a new telephone system and software were installed to ensure phone calls could happen. Initially the number of calls dropped but has now begun to increase.



We are reaching more new people than previously as we have a wider range of people to engage with.



Their webpage (<https://www.sussexoakleaf.org.uk/>) has been updated so people can log in and have a conversation with someone. This has helped reach out wider than previously.

The impact on Sussex Oakleaf residential clients and staff has been immense. The implementation of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), social distancing and trying to keep abreast of the changing and sometimes contradictory advice, has been very stressful.

## How has Covid-19 affected their finances?

The organisation lost revenue from their paid Home Service by around two thirds. Their Pathfinder services changed to virtual and telephone calls to keep in contact with people.

Commissioners have been supportive, which has been helpful.



We do need to secure some funding for smartphones for clients to keep in contact with us.



Due to the increases in workload and the mergers with Brighton Housing Trust on 1st April 2020, just after the lockdown changes, *which made merging staff and systems even more complicated and at times problematical*, it has been very *full on*. They did not have time to apply for any Covid-19-related grants.

## How have they begun to forward plan?

As all Sussex Oakleaf community staff are now working from home, IT has been critical to making this work. *Yes, some have struggled with this*, but this flexibility has always been something they wanted to do. Once it is safe to return to the office, the way they use the space may well be different.



“

What is needed to make it safe to return? Maybe limit to four people instead of eight. But it's the stupid things like the kettle, as lots of people touch this regularly, cleaning and Personal Protective Equipment.

”

It is important to restart running groups in the community and they may begin with a walking group to test what is possible. One problem is that the Government guidance is not clear. *Stay at Home was clear but what does Stay Alert mean? So we have continued as previously.*

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

The organisation's main concerns are finance, challenges of social distancing and PPE - for the Home Service to fully restart it needs PPE.

Longer-term impact of working from home on staff - *after 14 days working from home, I began to have aches and pains, headaches, eye strain and emotional issues. I recognised what was happening and changed the way I was working so I now take regular breaks etc.*

IT has been positive for reaching other groups and widening reach. It has been challenging keeping in contact with regular users and not seeing those who have not responded to the digital groups. The plan is to follow up with all members to *check in*.

The effect of job losses at Gatwick on Crawley and the county as a whole will increase demand for outreach working and workload. The main areas will be mental health issues, finance, support for people and the need for smarter commissioning. It is also concerning that there could be less support due to the effect of Covid-19 fall out.

## Contact details

To learn more about Sussex Oakleaf go to [www.sussexoakleaf.com](http://www.sussexoakleaf.com)

### Support with your mental health

Telephone: 01444 416391

Email: [info@sussexoakleaf.org.uk](mailto:info@sussexoakleaf.org.uk)





*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](mailto:helpdesk@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk)



Website - [www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk](http://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](mailto:cheryl.berry@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk)

