

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 West Sussex, Brighton & Hove is an independent local charity working in the community to support older people, their families, and carers. The charity works with people over 50 in the area, supporting and empowering them to make the most of later life.

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We've been working in the local community to help older people for over 60 years. We have more than 100 dedicated staff and over 300 volunteers helping us to deliver services and activities for older people in West Sussex, Brighton & Hove.

Helen Rice CEO Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove

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What were the immediate challenges?

Many of Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove members needed to shield or self-isolate as they were over 70 and/or living with a long-term health condition. Unfortunately, but for the safety of everyone, the charity's centres and facilities had to close.

The hospital discharge service was required to return people home, but with low levels of testing, there was no guarantee they were Covid-19 free. Many hospitals at that time were testing only if someone had symptoms initially. Crisis services still needed to respond within 24 hours.

To start with there were just so many questions raised; could they transport people who hadn't been tested? How can people be quickly supported by multiple agencies, within General Data Protection Regulation guidelines? They needed to ensure their staff and volunteers were kept safe and had enough personal protective equipment (PPE).

The charity also began a huge push to support people with shopping and prescription collections, delivering to people's doorsteps.

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There was a time when some older people weren't sure where their next meal was coming from. We had to make sure they had what they needed.

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How did this affect staff, and volunteers?

Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove continued to work with the people they had been working with, but in different ways. There was also a 70% increase in calls to the general telephone line, from people who had not contacted them before.

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People may have known we were there and not needed support previously, but suddenly found they needed help. Many older people started conversations *with “I don't want to bother you.”*

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They reconfigured staff into four main teams working on different areas.

- 1 Pink team - telephone calls in and triage services.
- 2 Blue team - telephone calls for shopping and collection of prescriptions, and someone to speak with if someone had died from Covid-19.
- 3 Yellow team - doorstep deliveries.
- 4 Red team - Crisis.

Crisis covered things like emergency carer breakdown - without their usual support systems during lockdown carers were left unaided 24/7 which put huge pressure on some.

Some staff had never worked in other parts of the business and have enjoyed the opportunity to do so. They also had to scale-up digital capacity. *The staff morale has been fantastic.* One thing they found was an increased need for wellbeing support through their employer support and Human Resources wellbeing programmes. All staff have worked flexibly and are now working from home with the right support and tools.

Their 150+ volunteers were supported by the volunteer co-ordinator, with telephone calls, emails and newsletters.

What were the immediate risks?

Some older people were facing horrific situations as they became more hidden, isolated and vulnerable. No-one was funding people to go into care homes at the beginning. Deterioration has been a problem, a lack of self-care and increased mental health issues. It is not unusual to learn of worsening hygiene, hoarding, mental health decline and an increase in falls.

This organisation is clear that there has been increases in death due to how older people have been managed during the pandemic. Our elderly have been failed.

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It is abhorrent that older people didn't seem to be a priority and many care homes weren't given the protective equipment they needed.

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As a support organisation for older people, it has felt like there has also been discrimination, in that older people have been treated as one homogenous group. Many older people are healthy and active, some even running marathons! To ask them to shield, as you assess their risk as the same as those who are frail and vulnerable is problematic.

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It became apparent that not many of our clients were digitally connected. We got many online during this period or helped in other ways.

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The voluntary and community sector has provided excellent services that *wrap around* statutory services and have prevented deaths. It's so important people realise how vital that role is.

How has Covid-19 affected their finances?

Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove only furloughed 30 people out of 400, those who worked at the activity centres. They paid the 20% uplift for those furloughed.

The charity was hit hard financially, losing many thousands of pounds a month due to cancellation of fundraising events, activities and centre closures. Despite some vital funding from West Sussex County Council, Age UK national, the National Lottery and careful planning, they may hit financial problems within twelve months if things are not managed carefully.

They have some challenges with Trust Funding as the organisation is *too big*.

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If your organisation has funds of over £1million some Trust Funders are not interested. But our size means we're doing more and helping more people.

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Some of their at home services were provided free of charge for six weeks during the pandemic - *as it is the right things to do*. The Government responded directly on some issues, but the charity felt there should have been more support for older people.

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Despite careful planning, this is still such a tough time with finances stretched to the limit. We are *so thankful* to those who have supported us during the crisis.

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How have they begun to Forward Plan?

Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove is listening to older people particularly around their views on easing the Lockdown. One aim is to grow their *At Home Service*. They are aware that there is a *high level of stress* for older people who feel isolated and want to go out more. Their campaign 'Be Connected', aims to safely connect people who are remaining at home and those who are venturing out.

They have supportive commissioners and the opportunity to work in wider partnerships during the pandemic, which is something they would like to continue and broaden.

Contact details

To learn more about Age UK West Sussex, Call **01903 731 800** Or visit their webpage <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/westsussex/>

Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester

Our role is to enable, support and promote VCS groups across Arun and Chichester.

- Support for Member Organisations. Please contact us by downloading our referral form from our [website](#) or emailing lucie.maldoom@vaac.org.uk
- We provide a Funding monthly e-newsletter, and our funding surgeries via zoom.
- We provide regular Networking and Training Events, see our e-bulletins and website for details.
- Our e-bulletin provides the latest information for the VCS.
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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