

# 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



The Friends are proud to be entirely volunteer led and operated, supporting St Richard's Hospital and local mental health services.



*All donations go directly to making a real difference for patients, visitors and staff.*

Jane Ramage



## What were the immediate challenges?

Friends of Chichester Hospitals began thinking about the potential effect of Covid-19 about a month before the Government announcements. They began doing extra cleaning activities - hand washing, surface cleaning and hand sanitiser to support infection control regimes and to keep volunteers safe.

When the Government announced that people over 70 years should *shield* or self-isolate they received a flood of phone calls. *Some stopped immediately, and some at the end of the following week*, and within two weeks all volunteers had stopped. The Hospital Trust was advised immediately this made cessation of the trolley service and closure of the Shop necessary

To run the shop at a normal level they need six volunteers daily, plus four to run the hospital trolley service. The trolley service ceased first, because of direct contact *with patients*. They closed the hospital shop the following week, removed all perishable items and planned a full deep clean. The premises were checked regularly and stock disposed of as sell-by dates approached.

## How has this impacted on volunteers and patients/service users?

The shop management team, all volunteers, kept in regular touch with the shop and trolley volunteers, and the office volunteers contacted each other regularly to keep morale up. In reality most knew it would take a while for things to get back to normal.

The impact of Covid-19 on patients/service users was significant in some respects as there were few non Covid-19 patients and family and friends could not visit. Occupational Health asked the Friends to provide newspapers, magazines and puzzle books to support the mental health of patients. This was organised via WH Smith vouchers purchased by the Friends and given to Occupational Therapists who could then take orders for items and deliver them to the wards. This *meant a lot to the patients*. For the Covid-19 patients, and others, who were beginning to feel a little better but not yet 100%, having something to stimulate the mind was helpful. No Friends volunteers could carry out any normal services.

Visiting patients is not yet back to normal. Some outpatient's services are open but with limited numbers and with social distancing waiting areas. Patients are not allowed to bring anyone with them to appointments. Footfall in the shop is low.



We realise that some Volunteers may decide not to come back because of the risks.



## How has Covid-19 affected their finances?

Friends of Chichester Hospitals believe the financial loss of the pandemic so far to be around £30,000, but they have received some very thoughtful unexpected donations. They do not have any staff salaries to pay as the whole service including fundraising is run by volunteers, but there have been extra costs associated with preparing to reopen.



They did not apply for monetary grants as no schemes appeared appropriate. However, they were successful with a Spirit FM grant scheme, which provided for a month of radio commercials - six clips a day for four-weeks and this finished at the end of August. The Friends were thrilled to receive this publicity for the charity.

They have provided more funding for *care in local mental health units than in a normal year*. Lockdown for service users in the various Sussex Partnership Trust centres at Graylingwell because of Covid-19 was extremely isolating, and the Friends provided materials for creative and therapeutic activities and devices to aid contact with relatives.

Funding has also been provided for medical equipment for St Richard's Hospital, for Covid-19 related and normal services when they are resumed. (An automated Cardiac Resuscitation machine supports staff performing CPR and a sophisticated adjustable examination chair for Urology will enable an enhanced diagnostic service for Prostate patients.)



We have not yet seen a specific item request that is unaffordable at the moment.



## How will social distancing impact on your service?

Friends of Chichester Hospitals contacted the hospital Trust as soon as the Government began changes to the lockdown, to discuss how the services could be resumed. Trust regulations, based on Government guidelines, prevented all volunteers over 70 years from returning. The team followed advice on disinfectant, sanitisation, reorganising the layout of the hospital shop to enable social distancing, till area screen etc. A risk assessment was carried out and recommendations implemented. Hand sanitiser and masks are provided. The Friends' insurers were consulted and approved the measures taken. A meeting of the charity's Trustees was then called, and they approved the proposal to reopen the Shop. So, from the 6<sup>th</sup> July they re-opened for four hours for five days a week.

The hospital is very quiet, but things are beginning to build up. The hospital has continued, in reduced form to provide non-Covid-19 services such as maternity. Staff customer levels are not yet back to normal but those who have visited the shop are pleased the Friends are back. At present, many hospital staff were redeployed to other areas, some staff are bringing in their own lunches and eating in a different area.



Until the restrictions on the over 70 years volunteers are lifted, they are not able to offer a longer service. They have recruited 4-5 new volunteers but are not yet able to train or recruit others. They hope to open for longer hours from early September as some over 70s may by then be able to return.



Covid-19 is the scariest thing in our lifetime since the Second World War.



Their office is small and difficult to social distance, but much work can be done at home. The trolley service is mothballed for the present. The trolley service provided the *human face as the only non-clinical interaction all week for many patients.*

So, they are on the way to “normality” - *the shop is open.*

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

Charities generally have suffered huge financial losses and need to be agile during this time. Keeping alert to risk is important as they seek ways to be flexible for patients. The Friends do not have the urgency of paying salaries and are in a fortunate position. But patients/service users are still being affected, and volunteers are disappointed that they cannot yet return to their normal active service, helping others. The charity remains positive and is looking at new ways of fundraising.

## Contact details

Email [admin@friendsofchichesterhospital.org.uk](mailto:admin@friendsofchichesterhospital.org.uk)

Or visit their webpage <https://www.friendsofchichesterhospitals.org.uk/>



# Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester

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

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We record what people tell us and share this anonymously with those who make  
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