

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



Stonepillow provide housing and support 365 days a year across the Chichester and Arun area, offering a complete recovery journey focusing on improving health and wellbeing, and sustaining independent living.

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We are working in partnership with other agencies across West Sussex to provide essential support for homeless and vulnerable people: safe, secure, high-quality accommodation, support with mental health, recovery and wellbeing, fresh food and essential provisions, keeping people safe and well during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hilary Bartle, CEO

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What were the immediate challenges?

Stonepillow started to see homelessness increase as *sofa surfers* - people who move from house to house - as the Government guidance stated people could not have *strangers* in their homes during the Lockdown. These people had no choice but to present themselves as homeless. Additionally, people were evicted from their homes due to increased mental health issues.

West Sussex district councils were given the responsibility of getting rough sleepers off the streets and were provided with some Government funding to support this. 246 rough sleepers were placed in hotels, there were 50 people across the Chichester and Bognor area.

The 'Everyone In' government initiative to get Rough Sleepers off the streets has transformed some clients' lives. Some grasped the metal of having a nice warm bed every night and food provided by Stonepillow's own COVID-19 food distribution service, so have been eating better, taking medication regularly and have improved mentally and physically, which has improved their confidence and self-esteem. Although, sadly some people did choose to return to the streets and more secure accommodation was found for the majority.



Bursteds Green GP Surgery have been amazing as they have taken on new patients, supported with telephone consultations. Been amazingly flexible.



Stonepillow re-opened their Chichester Day Centre to give people access to washing machines, see staff for support and food. Packed lunches were provided.



Our relationship with [Four Streets](#), [St. Pancras Church](#), [Heart Chichester](#) and [Turning Tides](#) strengthened as we have worked in partnership to support the homeless in the Chichester and Arun area.



What was the impact on staff?

Stonepillow had to change the staff rotas and many staff were doing 72 hour shifts onsite and then 9 days off. This was to protect people and families as staff only worked in one hostel for continuity, as well as to give staff enough time to recover. Extra staff had to be bought in during the rest days. There were changes to the day to day working for example, contact with clients was limited, there were no evictions. Stonepillow continued to provide support on site to all those who were living within hotels throughout lockdown.

Stonepillow staff provided lots of activities for clients; outdoor activities included art, and social distancing games. It was hard to social distance in the buildings and cooking was completed by a small number of people.

Stonepillow supported staff with weekly catch ups by Zoom, and through regular communications. Extra training to upskill staff in certain areas was also provided virtually.



What was the impact on volunteers?

A number of volunteers needed to *shield* and self-isolate themselves or had family members that needed to. This was frustrating for some. Some helped to distribute food and some were able to contribute whilst working from home such as renovating furniture and selling on Ebay.

Weekly news updates and quizzes were provided to keep volunteers in the loop.

What was the impact on clients?

The biggest impact for clients was loss of freedom, as not moving around and having to adapt their lives. For some people this was a huge challenge especially those with mental health conditions - real highs and lows, and suicidal thoughts. They were linked with Pathfinder and apps people could use. It helped that WiFi had been fitted in all supported housing.

Boredom has been the one thing that has got people down. In the hotels Stonepillow distributed distraction packs and links to other voluntary and community organisations such as mental health services, narcotics anonymous and alcoholics anonymous. It has been a time for innovation and thinking outside of the box.



Very fearful to begin with to the changed prescribing for methadone prescriptions. Our clients would go each day and take their methadone in front of the pharmacist to prevent overdose. The change was to be given a 14-day script.

We thought it was going to be a disaster, but people have been really responsible and have managed well. Yes, some really struggled but that is what we are there for. We have been really surprised at how well they have been coping. We also changed how we responded and facilitated their support.



How has COVID-19 affected their finances?

Stonepillow had to furlough the retail staff. Their revenue has been adversely affected as their shop *Restore* had to close with a monthly loss of around £12,000. They are having to continue to pay for the building, insurance upkeep etc. an outlay of around £17,000.



There are increased costs for personal protective equipment as two litres of sanitizer costs £75. The cost of putting Wi-Fi into all of the supportive housing buildings was massive. They purchased SMART phones so they could keep in contact with clients, and costs for those doing university courses. There were extra staff costs for extra hours and relief staff during the Lockdown.

However, their plans for IT have been bought forward by 12 months. They also had unplanned purchases to enable staff to work remotely.



Hugh ‘thank you’ to everyone in West Sussex for all of the donations, telephone calls and Sussex Community Foundation. An amazing community response.



They applied for funding all over the place: grants and foundation bids, some successful. Received some wonderful and much needed donations from local people. They are financially viable at present but if the Lockdown is extended, they cannot carry on losing *the amount they are losing*.

How have they begun to Forward Plan?

Stonepillow is looking forward proactively as many of the hotels, Travelodge, Butlins will need to re-open in July and have time to get ready for this. Some people have left Butlins and gone into permanent housing. There is a multi-agency project to prevent people re-entering the streets and a plan to move people from hostels into more appropriate accommodation including establishing their Housing First Project and restarting their [Hospital Admissions Referral Pathway](#) (HARP) project which addresses health inequalities.

Stonepillow are planning to re-open [Restore](#) and looking at how they can ensure the building is clean and safe. They are looking to see what solutions other shops and garden centre come up with. As they want to get back to work.

To set up a resource hub and group work with smaller groups and continue on Zoom. They want to reintroduce doctors, dentists and VCS organisations.

There is a need to look at things differently and plan for the anticipated second phase.

Contact details

To learn more about Stonepillow

Call **01243 537934** Or visit their webpage <https://stonepillow.org.uk/>



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.
- Volunteers - if you would like to advertise for volunteers please get in touch with Jenny.holmes@vaac.org.uk or go to our website to upload your information. <https://www.vaac.org.uk/volunteering>

Website: www.vaac.org.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/VAArunChi/

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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



How a voluntary organisation has adapted during COVID-19 - Case Study

