



How a Community Organisation Adapted During the COVID-19 Crisis

August 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



Parents And Carers Support Organisation

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Parents and Carers Support Organisation (PACSO) provide play and social opportunities for children and Young People with disabilities & their siblings, and respite for parents and carers in the Chichester and Arun districts of West Sussex.



At PACSO, we welcome children and young people of all ages (0-25) and disabilities - physical, learning, and behavioural. We will never turn away a child, no matter how complex their needs.

We know that parents and carers are the experts on their disabled child, and we work with them to help their child reach their full potential. No one organisation can meet a family's entire needs and that is why we work closely with statutory bodies and other voluntary organisations to bring about the best outcomes for the individual child in a time of great societal flux and financial challenge.

Sarah Webster Fundraising Manager



What were the immediate challenges?

PACSO had to move into Lockdown earlier as the organisation works with complex and vulnerable children and young people, some with immune deficiencies and other health conditions.

They filmed as much of the play activities and put this onto Facebook and the centre was deep cleaned. Unfortunately, their internet and data developed a fault and they had to sort this out but in doing so, they improved their IT systems and *moved over 100,000 documents to Sharepoint* within two weeks. This helped staff to work remotely and to be able to access the same document. This needed to happen, but the Lockdown sped-up the process.



The parents and carers have been very understanding.



How did this affect staff, and service users?

PACSO staff are young and energetic, so have embraced the move to webcalls, online videos, sending personal video messages and writing letters. *Their children's playworkers has been singing the childrens favorite nursery rhymes and songs,* which has been well received.

PACSO staff have been delivering activity packs to service users' homes and having a five-minute chat outside. So far, they have delivered *125 activity packs* and received photographs back. However, the phone calls have got longer and families really want socially distanced meet ups ~~group conversations~~.

Some of PACSO teenagers have found the Lockdown more difficult, the longer it has gone on. Although, they have moved activities to virtual they are unable to provide the much needed respite for parents.

For some of the older children 16+ years, family relationships have become strained particularly around the mixed messages of COVID-19 and social distancing. Many are feeling anxious which is impacting on their mental health. ~~However, those with Autism and Downs Syndrome have tended to be less anxious about being outside.~~ *However, other families have reported that their children have been less anxious during lockdown.*

For those in their early twenties the PACSO staff have been talking through their understanding of social distancing and expectations so that they feel less anxious.



Forward Planning

PACSO staff have started to plan for the end of Lockdown, they have reviewed the services they provided pre-COVID-19 and what they have provided during Lockdown and what they would like to maintain. But are not making any rushed decisions. All activities must be provided with the right level of assessment and responsible management and they will need to risk assess each child.



We would probably do less face to face activities with those children who are in the high-risk category due to health.



To date (June) PACSO have been in contact with 367/408 children during Lockdown.

How has social distancing impacted?

Staff are working from home, as the office space can only accommodate one person. Some staff are anxious about coming back into the office. As online working has gone well there are no immediate plans to change this way of working.

For service users with learning disabilities social distancing is a problem and they are undertaking risk assessments.



The risk assessment considers for example: can you hold hands? COVID-19 has made a different world. Things used to be very hands on with children. Yet children still need physical contact.



PACSO are planning a socially distanced walks where a family could meet one play worker. ~~There will be football and hula hoops for a family event.~~ There will be structured activities and play materials designed for each child. They hope to begin activities again in August/September. From September they are running afterschool clubs for 50% less children, in school bubbles. ~~October they hope to be able to host small clubs groups and run a booking system. Also, to open the sensory play in the garden. But it will be sometime before they can offer respite or short breaks to families.~~ Over the summer they planned a virtual summer playscheme *playtea* with a magician, and dancing, art, drama and talent shows for children and young people aged 0-25. ~~for children aged 4-5 years.~~

From an organisations perspective they are taking time to understand people's anxieties. ~~They are encouraging people to use their wider family members such as grandparents if they can.~~



How has finance been impacted?

Everything that PACSO has provided to families during the Lockdown has been '*free of charge*' and they will begin charging again once the schools go back. Their costs will increase, post-COVID-19, as they will need more staff and have fewer children, so less income. They are actively applying for grants and bursaries to cover this increase in costs as they do not want to pass this onto families. ~~Families will have increased costs as they will have to pay for taxis as they cannot use the minibus.~~

PASCO did not furlough any staff as they have been providing activities throughout the Lockdown to service users.

Contact details

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

