

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



Pregnancy Options Centre provides free, non-directive counselling and support to women and men, facing unplanned pregnancy or struggling following a pregnancy loss, including a miscarriage, stillbirth, ectopic pregnancy, therapeutic termination or after an abortion. They support both recent and historic experiences.



Pregnancy Options Centre, established in 1997, offers a free counselling service for anyone facing an unplanned pregnancy, giving them time and space to explore their thoughts and feelings in a safe non-judgemental environment.

Anna Madge CEO Pregnancy Options Centre



What were the immediate challenges?

Pregnancy Options Centre continued to be operational during COVID-19, providing support by telephone and video, something new. Unplanned pregnancy clients were offered an hour session to talk through their thoughts and feelings about their pregnancy, giving space to explore all options available to them with a non-judgemental volunteer counsellor.

Pregnancy loss and post abortion clients were offered an initial assessment to talk through their experience as well as regular check ins until face-to-face support can resume. If the person is at risk to discuss their pregnancy or circumstances by telephone, they were offered text or email support as well as signposting to other agencies, as appropriate.



Counselling online and over Zoom has had mixed take up but was successful for our existing people who we had built up a relationship with the councillor.



They have seen an increase in demand for unplanned pregnancy of around 60-70%. Normally they have a 50/50 split between unplanned pregnancy and miscarriage. One reason for this is that the sexual health clinics have closed so there is a lack of contraceptives provision.

Pregnancy Options Centre also works in local schools and youth settings across the district, delivering educational sessions on healthy sex and relationships, sexual health, online safety, signs of Child Sexual Exploitation, consent and the consequences of risky sexual behaviour. Our education team work closely with the Community Safety Teams to develop sessions as part of an early intervention and are supported by the District Council, working with vulnerable students across County Lines.

Young people are given tools to resist peer pressure, value their self-respect and gain confidence, helping them to build a firm foundation for adult life. They develop values that will impact positively on their health, wellbeing and safety, enabling them to make considered, responsible and well-timed decisions for themselves.

Pregnancy Options Centre's schools work is postponed until further notice but will certainly return to support local young people when safe to do so.

What was the impact on staff, volunteers and clients?

The impact on our volunteers was that the counselling service stopped and the numbers of volunteer decreased as many are from the NHS and they were needed elsewhere. Some volunteers are carers or need to shield or had children at home so found it difficult to support the service. It can be very difficult to create a safe space at home due to home schooling, outside distractions and finding a quiet space.



This reduced availability meant that a waiting list has formed and one staff member is providing a 'check in' service by phone to those on the list. They also supported the 'check in' role for Winchester, and Horsham centres.

They were running a volunteer training course which had to be stopped halfway through. They are currently actively recruiting new volunteers as the training takes a long time.

How has COVID affected their finances?

They are funded by grants, donation and fundraising. The impact of COVID 19 is the loss of grants and fundraising. The furlough scheme was helpful and has protected monies.

They are fine until December, but it is difficult to fundraise given the nature of their work. They do not have any contracts from NHS although pregnancy loss tends to go through general A&E. They have good relationships with midwives and bereavement counselling at St Richards Hospital.



We did have a planned fundraising event for the end of March, and this has been moved to November. This is for our unrestricted funding.



The Charity Aid IT Grant paid for the technology transition to be able to work remotely from home. Also, to set-up a server data etc as previously all was paper based. Everything is now online and password protective to comply with GDPR.

They are a small organisation and are supported by knowledgeable Trustees.

How have they begun to Forward Plan?

We are planning for the easing of the Lockdown but are monitoring Government guidance as to the timeframe. We are hoping to begin seeing people again by August but in reality, we will have to see how things go. Social distancing will impact on our counselling space, and appropriate policies and procedures will be needed. They are connected to the [Pregnancy Centre Network](#) who builds best practice, and this will help with understanding 'what works and what doesn't work'. As we want to work safely for our staff, volunteers and clients.

They have applied to the Sussex Community Foundation for monies to purchase mobile phones for volunteers. As their work is about the process and discussion and some people do 'check in' over a number of years especially anniversaries.





People will have support for as long as they need a space and a safe environment to discussed decisions on pregnancy, abortion, loss and adoption. As pregnancy loss is complicated and individual.



Pregnancy Options Centre is currently in the process of planning to re-open the centre for client support soon, whilst following government guidelines to protecting our staff, volunteers, and clients. Please see their [website](#) and social media pages for up to date information.

What are the concerns for the future, post COVID?

Their real concerns for the immediate future is funding and how to begin fundraising again. They need access to core funding for the service. Another area is guidance planning for ensuring compliance with Government guidance and duty of care.



We need help in getting back to normal in stages, and safely in general.



Partnership working has been tried on a small scale and found to be successful and they would like to be part of wider opportunities.

They would like to find economical ways to advertise their services and the different ways they engage with the NHS system including GP practices.

Contact details

To learn more about call **01243 784177**

Email office@optionschichester.org.uk

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

