

# 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

Four Streets is not affiliated to any political party and they are non-discriminatory.

## The Four Streets Project

Registered Charity Number 1187555

They exist to provide any available 'on the spot' and 'common sense' support to any person who is sleeping on the streets of Chichester or those known to be vulnerably housed as above.

**“** We recognise that the route to living on the streets and having no home can be multi-faceted. We do not make judgements regarding each person's individual story.

*Our collective and only purpose is to provide support i.e. food, drink, sleeping bags, clothing, referral to agencies to people sleeping out on the streets of Chichester, and those known to us to be vulnerably housed; the situation frequently referred to as 'sofa surfing'.*

Peter Gray, Trustee

**”**

## What were the immediate challenges?

When lockdown happened, Four Streets realised that they needed a central distribution point for the food, sleeping bags, socks etc that they support homeless and rough sleepers people with. St Pancras Church had closed during Covid-19 and they kindly offered the use of the porch area.

All of the food was put into food bags to be given out to homeless and rough sleepers.

The Council aimed to get the homeless and rough sleepers off the streets during Covid-19 lockdown and almost all were accommodated one way or another. This and the fact that they were receiving 3 meals a day meant that many looked healthier and happier than they had looked for ages.

There was a two-week period at the beginning of the crisis when things were changing by the minute; they were sending *WhatsApp* messages almost hourly. People were concerned about health issues *Am I going to be ok?* and *How are we going to do this?* The volunteers of Four Streets continued to provide their service throughout the lockdown period and did not miss a single night.

One of the main problems was that food donations suddenly stopped; they had always received generous food donations from Greggs and Pret amongst others but they all closed within ten days. So they went from *having lots of donated food to almost nothing*. So they decided to buy food and prepare it from donations. The local fish and chip shop and the local Pizza Hut gave some emergency short term support.

“ We provide a service without bureaucracy and we don't judge. Whatever the weather, we will be there. There is huge trust. When we told them we would be moving to a new central home at St. Pancras Church and that they'd need to be especially careful and to stay 2 metres apart, they were brilliant and really co-operative and appreciative. ”

In many ways, for them, Covid-19 was less important than where the next meal was coming from. Over the last 5 months, most of them have had access to a shower and have been in a much better state mentally and physically.

## How has Covid-19 affected their finances?

Four Streets is funded by donations and grants and they applied for emergency Covid-19 funding from the council and from the Sussex Community Foundation to be able to purchase food for the homeless and rough sleepers - both of these applications for crisis funds were successful. Once the restaurants start re-opening, it is hoped that their food donations to Four Streets will start again but this is by no means certain as the restaurants have themselves had such a tough time.

One thing the organisation has done during the crisis is to register for donations online via PayPal through their website. Donations increased at the beginning of Covid-19 and, here, the website and PayPal really helped.

Four Streets volunteers use considerable amounts of personal protective equipment - hand sanitiser, gloves and masks and this, in addition to the food, was the other main expense and, of course, will be ongoing.

## How have they begun to Forward Plan?

Four Street's 35 volunteers and homeless people do not want to go back to the previous walkabout system so they will continue to use the central distribution point. St Pancras Church has been a great support during the pandemic but will not be able to continue once they re-open but, fortunately, one of the other churches in Heart, St Paul's, has offered Four Streets a permanent home.

What has been most positive during Covid-19 is that they have been part of a partnership - Chichester Council, Stone Pillow, Heart, the Police and Foodbank with the single mutual aim of getting the homeless and rough sleepers off the streets. Hopefully, this partnership will continue after the lockdown and into the future, but this will be a real challenge, as will the continued accommodation of the homeless and rough sleepers this year and next year particularly over the winter period.



Things we have been trying to get off the ground for two years were sorted within two weeks. It was amazing what can happen when people decide to make it happen.



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

Four Streets provide food, water, soup, sleeping bags, hats, gloves and scarves to the homeless and rough sleepers on a daily basis and they have never missed a single night.



We've been delighted at the way all the various agencies involved have co-operated and communicated with each other so positively during this crisis. This has not always been the case and it would be wonderful if this can continue!



## Contact details

To learn more about Four Streets, email [info@fourstreetschichester.org.uk](mailto:info@fourstreetschichester.org.uk) or go the website; <https://www.fourstreetschichester.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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- 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](mailto:Jenny.holmes@vaac.org.uk) or go to our website to upload your information. <https://www.vaac.org.uk/volunteering>

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to make local health and social care services better for  
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We record what people tell us and share this anonymously with those who make  
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How a voluntary organisation has adapted during COVID-19 - Case Study

