



# 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



Home-Start Chichester & District covers the Chichester District Council area, to the Surrey border in the north, to the Witterings and Selsey on the south coast, to the Hampshire border in the west and to Tangmere in the east.

**“** *Being a parent, can be very challenging, especially when children are young. Many parents feel exhausted and overwhelmed by the stresses of family life. That's when Home-Start Chichester & District can help. A carefully selected volunteer, who has parenting experience, can visit regularly and offer emotional and practical support. This friendly parent-to-parent support is a simple yet effective way of enabling families to get back on track.*

Lois Rowlands Home Start Chichester and District



## What were the immediate challenges?

Home Start Chichester and District work from a very small office so moving staff to home-working was not a massive issue. They are supported by 45+ volunteers.

At the time of the lockdown they were working with 70 families and had to stop face-to-face contact which did make it difficult to establish and maintain new relationships. They moved to contacting families virtually; telephone, whatsapp on a weekly basis. There was also a dramatic decrease in Health Visitor referrals.



Part of our role is to help encourage people to go out of the house which became more challenging.



## What was the impact on staff, volunteers and families?

In the main the transition was smooth, although staff did find it stressful having to find new ways of working at home, which can be difficult given that they may have had to juggle home schooling, outside distractions and trying to find a quiet place to work and so on. Staff remained in contact with the families by telephone, text messaging and WhatsApp each week to offer advice and guidance and signpost to other organisations.

The impact for managers is that there is more *checking in* to ensure staff are coping well. Home Start UK, our parent body, have provided training in how to support and be aware of risk even though you cannot see what is going on in the same way.

Their volunteers responded well given that they were also trying to juggle family responsibilities. Some volunteers were in contact with the families they supported and also provided practical support such as dropping off food or essential items in a socially distanced manner.



Chichester Harbour Rotary Club donated Easter Eggs and craft packs for families, which has been very much appreciated.



The main impact for families in the lockdown was that it exacerbated mental health issues, as stress increased due to changes in income, loss of jobs or reduced hours. Families were just about managing but the longer-term is uncertain. Around a quarter of families supported are on benefits and receive support from the foodbank and other practical and emotional support day-to-day to cope.

Staff members were in contact with volunteers regularly. They also had a new set of 15 volunteers not yet matched to families, as some families chose not to be matched at this time and some are technically hard to reach.





We are concerned that there will be changes in unemployment and volunteering. As losing our volunteers is a concern.



## How has COVID-19 affected their finances?

Financially the organisation has seen an increase in funding from Trusts and Foundations as funders are keen to support charities through the COVID-19 pandemic. However there is concern that funding will drop off in the next financial year. Whilst their funders have been supportive. There is concern for the short to medium future.



We rearranged agreements with funders, who have been very supportive.



## How have they begun to Forward Plan?

The organisation has begun to forward plan in the medium term but do not as yet know when they will be able to restart the face-to-face groups. Although many families are happy talking on the telephone and have made the transition well there is concern for young children. *Many younger children are coping, they are with mum and relaxed at home*, however for many children this time has seen a significant reduction in opportunities for play and socialisation and there is a concern that starting nursery will be more difficult. Home Start is about broadening out horizons and re-socialising will be a challenge.

There are different levels of confidence to restarting things: staff have not left their homes; it is more difficult to provide support for people when as home visiting is not possible.

There is concern about Government guidance as it lacks clarity and not concise nor in easy read formats.



We need information on the Government guidance and how to obtain Personal Protective Equipment, how to use it particularly for children.



## Contact details

To learn more about call **01243 773477**

Email [admin@home-startchichester.org.uk](mailto:admin@home-startchichester.org.uk)

Or visit their webpage <https://home-startchichester.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](mailto: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](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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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:**



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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](#).

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