

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 led response of adapting and what the future holds.

About the organisation



Lavant is a civil parish in the Chichester District of West Sussex, 2.2 miles north of Chichester. It includes three villages: Mid Lavant and East Lavant, and West Lavant. It takes its name from the River Lavant which flows from East Dean to Chichester.

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Lavant has a high proportion of elderly people and more vulnerable people who had been advised to self-isolate in their own homes. Some are widows, widowers and incredibly lonely. Lavant is very aware of its community. We are conscious that people do not like to ask for help. We are supported by the Church and Parish Council the Lavant Support Group (COVID-19) was set up.

Robert Newman, Co-Leader

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With the support of the Rector, the church community and the Chair of the Parish Council the Lavant Support Group (COVID-19) was set-up in four days. *The offer was a friendly local contact who could telephone at an agreed time and frequency, run small errands - mainly the posting and collection of prescriptions, and very limited shopping errands. At no time would a volunteer enter any supported individuals' home or have any close contact.*

What were the immediate challenges?

It helped that they knew who to speak with to get decisions made. They did not set-up a committee, as wanted to get things done quickly. The church website was used to promote the group and a dedicated email address was promoted. They advertised in the Parish Magazine and distributed 1,200 leaflets.

They were concerned that the information went to everyone who maybe did not received the Parish Magazine and distributed a leaflet door by door.

The telephone line was quiet and they supported 17 people. The supporter/ supported lived in close proximity of each other and if someone had an issue they would knock on the door. A lot of people were checking on people they knew, some new commers to the community, neighbours and friends and families. *Some were too afraid to step out of the door.*



We are retired and had a florishing business.



The impact of COVID-19 meant people felt more isolated. The Memorial Hall and two churches were closed. Church services moved to Zoom with more than 60 people joining. Some people were distressed not because of COVID-19, but of the Lockdown. There is no shop in the village and the supermarket is a drive away.

The village green is beautiful and Chichester District Council empty the bins. However, they found that the bins needed to be emptied every day as so many of families were using the space for picnics, all socially distanced.

The community missed what makes us a community, monthly meetings, annual show and so on. They still have 57 volunteers and there are more people who would like to volunteer.



Many people have asked what can I do?
There is a strong desire to support.



How have they begun to Forward Plan?

The Lavant Support Group was going to begin shutting down, but the Rector is keen that it continues at a much lower level. So, all 57 volunteers have been emailed to see who is interested in continuing. 15 have responded so far. They want to be in place for someone to talk to. Maybe have trained counsellors and be good neighbours, as this strengthens outreach. Maybe hold some socially distanced events?



I would like to add an additional comment: for instance, on Lower Road we set up a WhatsApp group which covered nine houses and was used daily for shopping, collecting prescriptions etc. It was very small, and people were confident and unreserved in its use. A positive consequence is that it brought the community closer together. We all gathered by the road on Thursday night to clap the NHS at 2000 hrs. Talking took place every day. I would suggest that next time alongside the main village plan individual WhatsApp group are encouraged.

Chair of the Parish Council



What has been learnt from the experience?

They instigated a reverse safety system of all volunteers' - actions were recorded in an email, read and logged by a Parish Councillor. This provided a written record of the contacts in case of issues down the line.

All the advice they could find was not to take any money from the supported for shopping errands etc, a potential carrier of COVID-19. The only solution experienced was Waitrose offering a pre-paid electronic payment card, which worked, but did need a new card not a top up when it ran out.

They had no difficulty collecting prescriptions for local residents. In fact, many were surprised at the **zero-proof** required to collect a prescription for someone not living at your address and not related to you.

The initial concept was to run the Support Group for the benefit of the residents of Lavant. However, the parochial boundary of Lavant is rather fluid and the Group were supported by volunteers and supported those outside the actual Parish boundary.

Contact details

To learn more about the Group visit the churches website:

<https://www.lavantchurches.net/> Email support@lavantchurches.net



Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester

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