

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



Bringing local dementia services together under one roof and providing the latest support, information, advice, and activities to those living with Dementia



We offer Wayfinding to help guide families through their personal dementia journeys, as well as day care, a range of activities for those living with dementia and their carers, therapy rooms, a hair salon, a smart zone with equipment and technology to support independent living and a café.

Sally Tabbner, CEO Sage House



What were the immediate challenges?

Sage House had to stop all face-to-face services, but had good contingency plans in place which enabled them to move quickly to: extend the *help lines* to seven days a week, to set-up a *befriending service* as well as a *shopping and prescription delivery service* whilst making *welfare calls* to 150 customers and sending out *activity packs* to all daybreak customers within the first week of the pandemic.

One challenge was the Government guidance as they found themselves *in the position of waiting and chasing for information and there was a lack of response from the statutory sector, county council and others as to how they were going to respond and the part the charity could play.*

They began working with the local Parish Councils to support those who were isolated and lonely within the local community. A shopping and prescription collection service was set-up to help support. Partnership working was established with Age UK West Sussex and Carers Support West Sussex to ensure that there was a good timely response to people in need.



A few GP surgeries had sent out *Do not resuscitate* letters to some of our customers and it caused such distress to some customers at such a frightening time. We had to help calm individuals whilst picking up the issue with the CCG. It was such a challenge at an already challenging time.



Sage House itself was offered to GP's and clinical leads as a '*hot house*' i.e. a COVID clinic as it could provide what they needed in terms of space but the system was in *panic and not hearing, communication went out the window.*

What was the effect on Staff, Volunteers and Customers?

Staff were relocated to working from home to support volunteers and customers. The team provided virtual breaks via Zoom and telephone calls in order to give the carers a break and then followed up with welfare checks for the carer themselves.

Our Trustees also supported the work *one Trustee came into the office and packed up a huge proportion of the Activity packs - something so small made such a difference to people. It started at 300 activity packs and then rose to nearly 4,000 being sent out during lockdown.*

Demand increased and they moved to provide even more emotional support for those '*shielding*', as dementia related issues spiralled as it was difficult to achieve the same level of stimulation whilst in lockdown. Some carers of course loved being able to engage more fully with their loved ones, but many struggled and the calls soon became much sadder and very challenging for staff to respond to without face-to-face support. We held regular debrief sessions with staff throughout because the cases were so tough emotionally at times.



The 'day break' service, a carers respite service, stopped immediately when lockdown was announced and suddenly the carer was left to look after someone, often in the advanced stages of dementia which is so difficult for carers. 9 people went into residential care as Sage House could not support them during that period and many others had to have increased care agency time which meant increased costs for the carer.

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The levels of anxiety during this time was immense on everybody - the staff felt guilty and at times useless as they couldn't provide direct care and support.

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How has COVID affected their finances?

The main challenge is loss of income from the delivery of services and also of fundraising opportunities - Sage House is completely funded by fundraising with individuals, corporate partners, trust and family trusts, there is very little commissioned funding received by the charity. The bulk of the Government funding seemed to be going to big and national charities and not being passed down. Sussex Community Foundation are passing on smaller amounts which is helpful.

They did not need new technology for the changes, as Sage House was set-up just two years ago and the system was modern and coped easily from a software perspective in shifting to virtual and home working.

The organisation had to furlough eleven staff and agreed to pay the 20% for an agreed period and then reduce down over a period of time giving staff the ability to manage their personal positions.

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Staff met together weekly by Zoom and the CEO produced a weekly blog so people could keep up to date with what was going on in the Charity. The Charity also provided an emergency response, working with hospital social work teams to support those being rapidly discharged. They sourced and provided beds, food, duvets and so on.

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How have they begun to Forward Plan?

They have a skeleton staff back in July but there will not be any face-to-face services to begin with, but they do need to bring the team together. In September it is hoped they will be able to open the 'daybreak' as this will have the most positive impact for carers and their cared for person. They will continue providing Wayfinding by Zoom and telephone.

A lot of work has been done to ensure that risk assessments and appropriate policies are in place so that they can feel comfortable to open up again.

Contact details

To learn more about call **01243 888691**

Email info@dementia-support.org.uk

Or visit their webpage <https://www.dementia-support.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
- 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 or go to our website to upload your information. <https://www.vaac.org.uk/volunteering>

Website: www.vaac.org.uk

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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:



Telephone - 0300 012 0122



Email - helpdesk@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk



Website - www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

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](#).

If you have questions about the content of this update, please either call 0300 012 0122 or email cheryl.berry@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

