

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



In a relatively isolated seaside town, **Selsey Community Forum** is a partnership of local voluntary organisations which, in cooperation with the statutory and commercial sectors, seeks to identify and meet local needs.



Our current services mainly involve social support to the local community which is provided through the Selsey Care Shop. We are also involved in providing a safe cycle route from Selsey to Chichester.

Mike Nicholls, Chairman



What were the immediate challenges?

Selsey Care Shop was the base for the Mutual Aid (COVID-19) Group, working in partnership with 20 local organisations. Selsey Community Forum offered to take the lead, which meant that 140 buddies (volunteers) provided food, practical help and support for those shielding or self-isolating, a lending library was set-up etc. and this has all worked very well for local people.



We are at the phase where we are working out what we do with all this. As the COVID-19 Group will wind down once the *shielding* advice lessens in July.



This has been a good foundation in which to build on, we do normally worked well together, but the COVID-19 challenge has enhanced the need to come together. The response *is a reflection on the community, and organisations and individuals.*

Selsey Community Forum had to close the Care Shop and staff worked from home. They were fortunate that one volunteer was IT savvy and able to connect the telephone system for home use. Many of their volunteers responded and made a lot of telephone calls to people who were lonely. *People were faithful and continued to make calls from home.*



We took the safeguarding element seriously particularly for those in contact with vulnerable people.



Selsey Community Forum were able to promote these new ways of working in the local community as Selsey press provided *free of charge* 6,000 printed cards. These were posted through letterboxes in the local area. With the support of Selsey Town Council the lending library was set up, which provided DVD's, books and puzzles.

Selsey Community Forum set up food supply supported by Selsey Foodbank, Harvest UK, locals suppliers and take away outlets. They encouraged people to support local businesses. And a buddy system, WhatsApp and Facebook groups were up and running by late March. *People knew where help was.* Selsey Community Forum also coordinated with the West Sussex County Council Hub - particularly for those *shielding*. Their administrator increased her hours to full time.

One challenge people faced was getting cash to pay for shopping. Volunteers collecting shopping and would pay on their own credit card and then claim from a welfare fund. Then each month the fund would claim from the local person. This was a lifeline for between 20-30 people. *They now want to make the Buddy System part of their on-going offer.*

What was the impact on staff, volunteers and service users?

Selsey Community Forum ensured they took care of staff and volunteers in terms of welfare and mental health. Out of 180 staff and volunteers only one person left because of stress and needed a break.



Selsey Community Forum provided regular supervision and *informal chats*. *Staff and volunteers received a 'treats box' and a certificate to show appreciation*. They had a practical plan to say 'thank you'.

“

We provided a cream tea and doorstep conversation to those we supported.

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The negative effect of COVID-19 for the community was that it was *frightening*, and *a lot of people do not want to come out*. There are a lot of people struggling with loneliness behind closed doors.

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A husband supporting his wife with vascular dementia was tearing his hair out and not coping because he could not go out and leave her on her own.

”

For those with financial hardship they had the *Welfare Fund* to help pay for things such as rent arrears, and shopping. What was positive is that the seven care homes remained COVID-19 free. The care workers did a marvellous job.

Facts and figure from this project:

- 700 telephone calls each week
- 2,000 human contacts - prescription and shopping collections
- 200 people used the lending library
- 200 households received food on a regular basis
- Fortnightly magazine Senior Selsey News.

What are the immediate needs for service users?

The pragmatic answer is that there is an enormous amount of mental health needs emerging. There is a heavy concentration of young people not coping with loneliness. In fact some young people are *finding it harder than elderly people*. Selsey Community Forum have a small counselling and bereavement service which is fully utilised. They know that not all people ask for help and there are barrier to be overcome.

How has COVID affected their finances?

Selsey Community Forum has found that during the COVID-19 crisis and Lockdown they have provided practical support. They appreciated the support from Sussex Community Foundation. They have found that funders have been generous in their provision and they have worked hard in making grant bids. A lot of donations have come from local people sending in £50 and £100 one volunteer gave £1,000.



It is a 2-way process, people do not have to give but we are grateful to receive this much appreciated local support.



For many charities the biggest hit has been from not being able to fund-raise, events, car boot sales and tabletop sales. They have also lost basic income from membership fees. Until things open again, they will not know the full impact.

How have they begun to Forward Plan?

Selsey Community Forum has developed a three-month interim plan. They have eased off the COVID-19 response and put in place practical plans for the buddy system and other services. Some face-to-face meetings are happening in a socially distanced way. For example, *a garden meeting in small groups during July as people are just glad to see another human face.*

Out of all this partnership work the Selsey Community Forum want to build on this and do more. People know their neighbours better than before through WhatsApp and information. Hidden needs have come out from this way of working and to some extent people have developed patience and kindness. They want to build a community that supports the unemployed and other needs to become *totally comprehensive.*

What has been learnt is that the Buddy System has helped people be more aware of looking out for each other and aware of each other. Selsey is by the Sea and there is always a threat of flooding and we have shown how an emergency response for vulnerable people can be pulled together quickly - as the community is already there and there is trust and relationships formed.



Sharing stories with statutory bodies is increasingly important. The charity sector has been at the forefront of what has been done during COVID-19. Things need to change from sitting in countless meetings 14 representatives from the County Council, District and Town Council and just one from the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).



The VCS are meeting the needs for the Selsey area they are the first, second and third sector. As they mobilise things for local communities.

Selsey Community Forum have plans in place if the anticipated second wave becomes a reality. For now, Staff and Volunteers are tired and need to take a break. As we do need to take care of those on the front line.



It is the third sector that has acted. Sometimes the statutory agencies talk and there is no action.



Thank you from Selsey Community Forum Chairman



To be Chairman of Selsey Community Forum at this time is an immense privilege. Not only a great community. We are fortunate of the quality and commitment of staff and volunteers who have done such a wonderful job during the pandemic.



Contact details

To learn more about Selsey Community Forum

Call **01243 201616**

Or visit their webpage www.selseycommunityforum.com



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.
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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
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How a voluntary organisation has adapted during COVID-19 - Case Study

