

# 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



Sylvia Beaufoy Youth Centre, the Petworth Youth Association (PYA) has provided a unique service to the young people of Petworth and the surrounding villages in rural West Sussex for the last 50 years.

Through the Sylvia Beaufoy Centre they offer a safe meeting place and a base for youth work in the area. They aim to give opportunities to all young people - regardless of their economic background - to gain informal learning qualifications and skills for living.



## What were the immediate challenges?

The Sylvia Beaufoy Youth Centre had to deal with completely new way of engaging with young people and had to reinvent itself. They have only engaged with about 18% of the young people who would have come through the doors for face-to-face interaction before the pandemic and Lockdown.

They have developed a good relationship with the local school, being able to help practically; *a young girl who was doing schoolwork on her mobile phone and we were able to get her a laptop.* The school have also been passing on details of pupils not engaging with schoolwork so that they can make additional contact to check on their welfare.



There has been a spike in mental health issues, some are really struggling and can be down as they are not sure what to do now.



## What have been the risks to Service Users as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Sylvia Beaufoy Youth Centre staff informed that there seems to be a lack of ability or imagination amongst the young people. They don't seem to be able to focus and motivate themselves to do things. Going outdoors is a real problem for some.



Some people are hiding away from life as it is what they have become used to..... Adolescence can make or break you and it is that external part that is missing to help and guide. They are not developing in the way they should, and the effect is really sad.



Anxiety levels are peaking, and young people will relapse time and time again. For some they will have the '*I just don't care*' attitude. This will be a problem for a long while and is due in part to a lack of boundaries and role models. Which will lead to a rise in potential perceived anti-social behaviour.

## How has this impacted on staff and volunteers?

Sylvia Beaufoy Youth Centre has kept staff motivated throughout the pandemic. Youth work is a very relational job and for many it is a second job, or they are a volunteer. They have achieved this support through a *WhatsApp Group*, being in contact every day, sharing ideas and chatting. There has only been one member of staff being paid contracted hours, two have been furloughed, so it has been hard for them and the sessional paid staff and volunteer.



## What resources/services have been provided that have had the most uptake and feedback?

The Sylvia Beaufoy Youth Centre is now running a weekly Zoom cookery course. The staff and young people shared that it “*makes them feel like they are in the same room*”. They deliver the ingredients to those who want to take part, which also means they get to ‘*set eyes on*’ all of the young people on their priority list.



I knock on the door, do a quick check-in - see them face-to-face and see if they are alright. Seeing whether they are doing ok is the reason why you do your job.



Parents have told staff ‘*thank you for checking on them*’ and the young people remain engaged week after week. The numbers joining has risen each week. They have also set up a *closed chat group* for young people and have received quite a few messages. The peer support is essential because they are used to being with each other Monday to Friday 9-5 and then to suddenly not be with each other is hard, almost like mourning and it really gets young people down.

## How has COVID-19 affected their finances?

The Sylvia Beaufoy Youth Centre informed they are in a good financial position because of the level of reserves they hold. Nonetheless, each month a big chunk is disappearing, mainly to fund staff. The main significant cost is the building and lost revenue from renting to other groups. However, they have used the closure time to clean the centre fully and maintain this level of cleanliness, but this has incurred extra costs. They estimate an £8,000 loss in income but did receive an emergency grant from Chichester District Council for which they are grateful.

## Has forward planning begun for the Organisation once restrictions ease?

The team has been sharing ideas and discussing how to forward plan. They had hoped this could be at the end of July but in reality, are planning for September. Although they may be able to return slowly over the Summer, with the likes of bike rides, orienteering and nature trails. This will involve a lot of practical logistics of social distancing especially when the weather starts to change to indoors activities. They will almost certainly use face masks and shields as the staff have to be able to protect themselves and their families.



They hope to continue the cookery course as well as the online chat groups, loan of bikes, Netflix parties and cinema nights every so often. The biggest worry for the team is re-engaging with young people as they had 80 people on their books, and they are only engaging with around 15 (18%) currently.



When we return, doing normal youth club just isn't going to cut it. When we can go back and we get into the swing of things, we will do an activity every single day to bring them back up and pull them back together.



**Please note:** Healthwatch has produced a [case study](#) of young people's views and experiences on digital services, that offers some useful insight that may answer, in some ways the club's lower engagement rate with young people.

## What are the concerns for the future, post COVID-19?

The Sylvia Beaufoy Youth Centre looks forward to reopening when it is safe to do so, but this needs clarity on '*what to do and when*'. They feel that the voluntary and community sector needs additional financial support to continue its vital work. There will be a lasting impact on young people they and others support, and they will be dealing with these effects for a long time to come.



Listen to what the young people are saying and wanting. Give them the power and the opportunity to talk. That is the biggest advice we could give.



## Update since conversation

The Sylvia Beaufoy Youth Centre have managed to run some activities over the summer. They have had 29 different young people attend the sessions with a large percentage from social housing. In all a total of 208 young people attended these sessions. These numbers and the increase in anti-social behaviour around the town during lockdown supports the need for the youth club to be open.

They have plans in place if needed for a 2<sup>nd</sup> lockdown and all sessional staff have returned to work to support the activities. The new COVID-19 guidance does not apply as they are providing educational needs.

## Contact details

To learn more about the Sylvia Beaufoy Youth Centre:

Call **01798 344880**

Or visit their webpage <https://sylviabeufoy.org/>



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