

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

West Sussex Mind is an independent local charity who support people with their mental health, provide specialist training and campaign to improve services and promote understanding.



Our work is driven by the needs and experiences of people with mental health problems. The advice and support we offer aims to improve people's physical and mental well-being, strengthen self-esteem and confidence and promote strong relationships with family, friends and communities. We also help people get into education, training or work and achieve their personal and social goals.

Kerrin Page, Deputy CEO and Head of Operations for MIND West Sussex



What were the immediate challenges?

One of West Sussex Mind's main challenges was to close all face-to-face services with service users and move staff to home working, providing support remotely. Many of their staff team of 80 people already had laptops, mobile phones etc. and they had recruited a digital manager in 2019, so they were well prepared to move to home working quickly. Everyone accessing support was contacted by telephone to explain the changes and support available. A new risk assessment and regular *check-in's* were also established. Certain services are supported by volunteers and Peer Mentors - they ensured those who could support were included.

The priority issue early on was identifying individuals who were more vulnerable and who would need more proactive support and access to practical help because of this. Once they were confident that these individuals were being supported a wider offer was developed. A staff rota was set-up for providing telephone support, individual and group video sessions, and a new out of hours service was re-designed to offer evening and weekend support. They updated their webpage to reflect these new ways of working.

“ Although mental health is a big issue which many people are talking about we did not see the rise in people asking for support one would have expected during lockdown. But we are starting to see a rise now as the lockdown has eased. ”

West Sussex Mind and other Pathfinder organisations did not see an increase in demand during lockdown but as lockdown eased demand began to slowly increase. This could be *due to people finding their own ways of coping or not reaching out for support as they would usually*, but no one knows really. What is known is that there was a drop in GP appointments as many believe incorrectly that *services are not open*. Maybe the COVID-19 trauma has not *hit people yet* but know it will and they are planning for this.

“ Some older people have felt isolated and lack IT skills but many have joined the sessions provided to learn about IT. ”

West Sussex Mind sent out regular email newsletters, also physical newsletters, in some services birthday cards and made lots and lots of telephone calls - some very emotional - to ensure people did not feel so isolated.

How has COVID-19 affected their finances?

A lot of their income comes from contracts so finance was not as major issue for West Sussex Mind as for some other charities and because of this they have continued to provide their core services. But they do *need to tighten their belts* as some income has been lost and community fundraising and events have been put on hold. None of their 80 staff team were furloughed, as they were all needed to continue to support people who needed help remotely.

How have they begun to Forward Plan?

The organisation has begun forward planning and is having the types of conversations that may be needed as people move from the reaction to planning phase and how to sustain the business.

They are gearing up for how to cope with a significant increase in demand for services and support in the Autumn which is expected.

The biggest impact has been on service users and they need to map how the first phase went - food, medications stage - and the *here and now* - calmer stage - so that they know what the *ebb and flow* is to respond appropriately. People are more used to things, but the pandemic is going on longer than at first thought and people do need more support, reassurance, to be able to talk things through. Some people have found things are fine, some people have just continued as normal outside of the Government guidance and some are struggling big time.

West Sussex Mind has continued to work in partnership with a range of other voluntary and statutory partners to make sure that people's needs are met, and that learning is captured for the future.

“ A big challenge is keeping on top of things, being able to open again - risk assessments, PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), HASAWA (Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 requirements), safeguarding and more importantly time to process and set up safety. ”

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

The recruitment of volunteers is a challenge as it takes about 6-8 weeks and then time to get them up to speed and this is more difficult remotely. West Sussex Mind want to increase their use of volunteers and Peer Mentors. It is looking to re-introduce face to face support in a safe and managed way.

“ The real challenge is finding head space to map things out as well as providing business as usual. ”

Contact details

To learn more, visit their webpage <https://www.westsussexmind.org/>

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Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester

Our role is to enable, support and promote VCS groups across Arun and Chichester.

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- 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.
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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