

CEO's message

We ended the 2019-2020 tax year just after the Prime Minister's announcement that the nation had to lock-down.

Fortunately, we predicted that this was going to occur and by the time of the announcement we:

- Already stopped the delivery of all our face-to-face service (20th March 2020).
- Set up a COVID19 response team to monitor, continuously risk assess the situation and identify opportunities.
- Had a lock-down remote service plan ready to continue to support our clients

What we did not predict was that, due to the announcement, our remote working volunteer' mobile phones order would not be delivered on the 24th March 2020. This led to having to make a new order and physically delivering them to the team.

During the 1st lockdown we saw our volunteering workforce reduce from 119 to just 34 while our demand reached levels never seen before. I am very grateful for the commitment of all our volunteers but particularly thankful to these 34 amazing people who helped during such challenging times. I am also thankful to the local MP who recognised their contribution to the local community and awarded them all with the **Volunteer of the Year** award.

Even though we had to change from mostly face to face to an entirely remote service, lost the majority of our volunteer workforce and had the issues with the delivery of the mobile phones, we continued to help people with **no interruption to the service**.

Staff and volunteers worked extra hours and took on new roles by delivering food and topping up pre-payment meters, making wellbeing calls to our local GP's patients and made sure that they had access to food and medicine. They have shown a level of resilience which makes me extremely proud to be part of such an organisation.

Our funders have been very flexible and allowed us to continue to deliver services even if not the ones they were funding us for. The covid support funding that was made available allowed us to put more resources on the delivery of our service and free the management team to recruit more volunteers, develop more remote services and plan on the future.

It also allowed us to secure funding to set up a county-wide energy advice telephone service to support the many fuel-poor residents accessing our fuel vouchers schemes.

Thanks to the DWP Winter Grant funding made available to us by West Sussex County Council between December 2020 and April 2021 we, together with our partner Citizens Advice in West Sussex (North, East and South), were able to distribute £250,000 worth of measures including boiler repairs, blankets, and coats to make sure that West Sussex residents were kept warm during the past winter.

I am extremely thankful for the respect, support and flexibility shown by our funders.

I also want to thank the local authorities for allowing us, together with others such as Voluntary Action Arun & Chichester, to be part of the local COVID response team. This strengthened an already strong relationship and allowed for the amazing work that we are now doing with them and other partners including on looking at local food systems, monitoring the local financial impact of the pandemic and the sharing of accurate and up to date COVID19 information through the COVID champion.

Although it has been a challenging year, we have learnt that we are an extremely resilient organisation that is able to, during very difficult circumstances modify the services delivered to make sure that our clients continue to receive our services and that as a community we get together to try to overcome any challenge thrown at us and can work in partnership very effectively.

It is predicted that the year 2021-2022 will see many in financial hardship and it is important that we continue to work together to overcome any obstacle and deliver the services that our communities need.



Luca Badioli
Chief Executive

During this challenging year we helped **11,332** people with **28193** issues with high demand for welfare benefit, employment and relationship & family advice. This sadly reflects the year we have passed with people's increased need to claim benefits, concerns about their employment and reported incidents of domestic abuse.

Due to multiple factors, including the measures set up by government to reduce hardship and not being able to provide a face-to-face service, we saw a reduction of people with long-term conditions and disability approaching our services and the age group of the majority people approaching us shifted from 50-64 in 2019-2020 to 30-44 in 2020-2021.

As we know the BAME communities have been heavily affected by the pandemic and this is also reflected on our data as we saw an increase of 5% from those communities approaching us.