

 **Hastings Community Network – 18th September 2020**

**Learning From Lockdown**

**Introduction**

**HCN is an overarching network comprising of local voluntary community and faith groups, networks and forums**. It offers communication channels between the voluntary and community sector and those who make decisions locally. We identify ways in which members can participate and influence decisions affecting the delivery of services.

HCN links with Hastings Borough Council, East Sussex County Council and is a member of the Local Strategic Partnership.

HCN events take place every 12 weeks and aim to create meaningful opportunities to share ideas, gain inspiration and collaborate in new and exciting ways. These sessions are open to all and bring together participants from across voluntary, community, public and independent sectors.

**HCN’s are either:**

* **Market place and “open-mic” sessions**, which are flexible and predominately unstructured. Offering a full morning of informal networking and relationship building.
* **Themed sessions arranged around ‘Hot Topics’** identified by HCN members and/or through feedback at previous events. Over the last year Hot Topics that have been explored include Social Prescribing, Ageing Well and Loneliness.

Each event emphasises the connectivity between all ‘Hot Topics’ and encourages participants to think, and work across boundaries, build on shared resources and value local assets.

The themed ‘Learning From Lockdown’ event was different in that, due to COVID19, it was a virtual event held on Zoom. Within the event we held three themed workshops.

The September 2020 HCN brought together 49 representatives from across the community, voluntary, independent and public sectors to explore the ‘Hot Topic’ Learning From Lockdown.

Carole Dixon in her role as Chair of the HCN Executive, opened the event welcoming participants and launching the nominations for the HCN Executive and the HVA Board elections. The participants were then allocated to the Breakout Room of their chosen workshop:

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| **DIGITAL INCLUSION** |
| **NAME** | **ORGANISATION** |
| Lucy Price (Facilitator) | Good Things Foundation |
| Iain Boyle | Fulfilling Lives |
| Caitlin Byrne | Groundwork (HHH) |
| Jane Caley | Association of Carers |
| Caroline Castle | Southdown/Community Connectors |
| Tracy Dighton | Citizens Advice |
| Anna Herrieven | RSPCA Mallydams Wood Education Centre |
| Kanna Ingleson | East Sussex Recovery Alliance |
| Jacy Kilvert | MIND |
| Catherine Lulham | People in Partnership |
| Emma Lyden | Dementia Information Support Courses |
| Clementine Manning | Sussex Prisoners Families |
| Lynne Mishon | Breakeven |
| Ian Noble | Charity Mentors East Sussex |
| Kate Richmond | East Sussex Community Voice |
| Tracey Rose | Fellowship of St Nicholas |
| Erica Smith | Hastings Online Times |
| Karen Swain | Recovery College |
| Peter Thorpe | Hastings Voluntary Action |
| **VOLUNTEERING** |
| Debby Anderson (Facilitator) | Hastings Voluntary Action |
| Kirstie Addleton | Southdown/Community Connectors |
| Su Barnicoat | Hastings Voluntary Action |
| Kim Batty | Hastings Emergency Action Resilience Team |
| Alison Bissett | East Sussex Recovery Alliance |
| Martin Colvin | Pestalozzi International Foundation |
| Alastair Fairley | Hastings Emergency Action Resilience Team |
| Lorna Johnson | Care for the Carers |
| Mel Willson | Southdown |
| **INSTITUTE for VOLUNTARY ACTION RESEARCH (IVAR)** |
| Steve Manwaring (Facilitator) | Hastings Voluntary Action |
| Julie Abson | Sussex Community Development Association |
| Sherry Clark | The Common Treasury  |
| Andrew Colquhoun | Counselling Plus  |
| Teresa Flower | Groundwork South |
| Ian Gillespie | Hastings Opportunity Area |
| David Perry | Seaview Project |
| Emile Tambeh | East Sussex County Council |

The participants were then brought back together and the workshop facilitators gave a brief feedback from their respective workshops:

**Digital Inclusion**

* All services are having similar problems and working around them in similar ways
* Difficulties include: getting devices to people and identifying the different levels of support that people need
* The Digital Inclusion Working Group focusses on practical solutions
* Local and national training support is needed
* The suggestion that organisations extend their WiFi to include the space outside of their buildings
* Space to see people face to face is needed
* Free equipment
* Local expertise from people willing to give their time.
* Resources need to be shared
* There will be a follow up Digital Inclusion meeting

The slides from the Digital Inclusion workshop can be found on the HVA HCN webpage and can be found by following the link: <http://www.hastingsvoluntaryaction.org.uk/news/learning-lockdown>

The Good Things Foundation have lots of relevant resources and information freely available on their website: <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/areas-of-work/digital-inclusion>

**Volunteering**

* Volunteering roles have been adapted in lockdown to account for the lack of face to face contact. It has been difficult keeping those volunteers whose roles could not be adapted, engaged and motivated.
* Ways of keeping volunteers engaged have included sending newsletters, weekly calls, offering access to wellbeing support, providing COVID safety updates and socially distanced future planning meetings.
* As restrictions ease and volunteers start to reengage in roles that they could not do in lockdown, the positive impact on their wellbeing is huge.
* Of the organisations in the discussions, there was a very low number of new volunteers that were recruited due both to staff capacity to manage this and tto the breadth of volunteer opportunities available.
* Where large numbers of emergency response volunteers taken on (HEART), many of these have now returned to work but are still keen to engage in one off or micro volunteering opportunities.
* With many volunteers not being either digitally inclusive or organisations not having the capacity and resources available to address this, a huge opportunity was missed to keep volunteers engaged and to provide interim training/support whilst volunteer opportunities were on hold.

**Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR)**

IVAR HVA and other voluntary organisations in East Sussex together with the County Council are collaborating with IVAR (The Institute of Voluntary Sction Research) to undertake an in depth analysis of the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise Sector in East Sussex. This research (due for publication in Jan 2021) was commissioned before the COVID 19 oubreak. To look at the specific ways in which COVID was impacting on the voluntary sector a workshop was held to enable local organisations to reflect on their experience of and learning from the lockdown and subsequent period. A lively debate took place in which groups were asked to nominate issues against 3 catagories:- The good, the bad, and the surprising:-

The evidence of the workshop was also supplemented by other meetings (such as the 2 HCN “open mic sessions” and inputs following the event.

**The Good**
The sector and the local community had proved that it could mobilise quickly in response to the lockdown had developed a system to support the most vulnerable and creates processes and opportunities for collaboration with the public sector by developing a Community Hub.
 The sector had been quick to adapt to the use of new technology by quickly learning online alternatives to keep teams informed and services running.
 The sector had shown generosity by helping each other out with practical support.
 Opportunities for regular networking had been maintained online so that organisations felt connected.
 Although much has been made of digital inclusion, online processes also created opportunities to include people and expand opportunities. An example was given of how a local Counselling service was adapting its offer and how this was perceived by clients.
 Working online had made us rethink efficiency and many meetings which involved travel-time cold be conducted online.
 Important to get the balance right though and not lose human contact by building in opportunities for people to come together as a team not just for meetings. Particularly important where volunteers were concerned.

 Early funding had been made available from a number of sources (SCF and Lottery for example).

**The Bad**
 The Covid 19 pandemic had thrown a spotlight on the accommodation and spaces the sector occupies and how difficult it can be to make them COVID safe. The capacity of the sector to offer services would be compromised unless solutions can be found (HVA’S Director Steve Manwaring is pursuing this issue with the County wide SPACES board which brings together estate managers from across the public sector).
 VCSE organisations had incurred costs (adapting buildings and IT equipment) which would further impact on their reserves at a time when these had dwindled over the last few years because of funding reductions and austerity.
 Whilst funding had been made available to meet short term emergencies it was difficult for organisations to plan their medium term financial strategies because funding and commissioning intentions are unclear.
 The economic consequences of COVID are unknown but they will be felt in areas such as Hastings. This combined with the impact of a hasty or “no deal” Brexit will add to an uncertain future.
 Evidence about the impact of COVID on the BAME communities – revealed in both national and HVAs own research needed to be understood and responded to.

 Our fear is that young people will be disproportionately impacted by the aftermath of COVID

**The Surprising** COVID 19 could create an opportunity to reform service delivery, cross sector working and collaboration in a positive way. There is appetite to take this further.
 The experience of lock-down had created an enforced period in which individuals could re-evaluate their work/life balance and for organisations to examine other ways of working which could have positive results.
 The resilience and agility of the sector is a real asset and this has surprised the public sector (in a positive way)

Steve Manwaring closed the event thanking everyone that took part and a reminder that the HVA Board and the HCN Executive election nominations are now open.

Kim Kelly will be following up the event with a request for feedback and suggestions for a ‘Hot Topic’ for the next HCN event.

The next HCN events will take place on Zoom:

Friday 4th December, 1.30pm - ‘Looking at Future Priorities’

Friday 5th March, 1.30pm – ‘Climate Change’

To book yourself a place to take part in either of these events, please follow the link: <http://www.hastingsvoluntaryaction.org.uk/events>

The event was welcome, enabling us to come together

The session I took part in was very informative

I really took a lot away from the event

Thanks for hosting, it was really great

I found the event to be informative and interesting

There was good structure to the event

The breakout groups worked well