

Mr. G.C. Burt
Parish Clerk
Cocking Parish Council
46 Highfield Road
Bognor Regis
PO22 8PH

August 2021

Dear Mr Burt,

The past year has been a turbulent one for us all and in particular vulnerable older people, many of whom have found themselves dealing with extreme loneliness and isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic. At Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove we have been working hard to ensure support is always there for those that need it.

Due to the pandemic, we had to temporarily shut down some of the services we usually offer, such as our clubs, cafes and other face to face services, whilst quickly adapting to enable us to help those who were struggling and needed us even more at such a critical time. We continued to offer information and advice over the and we began offering support and befriending over the phone to those facing isolation and loneliness, doorstep deliveries of essentials such as groceries, medication and meals, and practical help to the most vulnerable, such as those returning home from hospital or living with dementia.

Demand for our support increased dramatically - by over 250% during the first lockdown - with many older people asked to shield and facing what felt like endless isolation from friends and loved ones. This demand continued throughout 2020 and into the lockdown in 2021, with more than 40% of those asking for support being new to the charity.

As we now move into new stages of the pandemic, we are acutely aware of the challenges older people are facing and these are continually evolving as the situation changes. Many are now dealing with the repercussions of a decline in physical and mental wellbeing due to lockdown restrictions and those who have been isolating and shielding, some for more than a year, are extremely anxious about the impact of returning to life outside of their home as restrictions ease.

We want to continue to be there for all vulnerable older people in our local communities who need support during these extraordinary times. As we know, loneliness and isolation is a key issue for older people anyway and the pandemic has only served to exacerbate this.

**Age UK West Sussex,
Brighton & Hove**
Suite 2, Anchor Springs
Littlehampton, BN17 6BP

 **01903 731800**

 **info@ageukwsbh.org.uk**

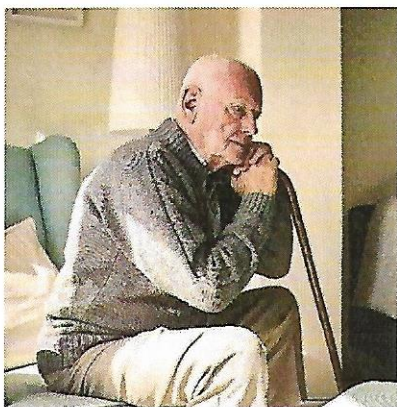
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Tackling loneliness and isolation across West Sussex – John*



John is a widower with no family. He hadn't left his house for a number of weeks when he contacted AUKWSBH to ask for help collecting a prescription as he was worried about going out during the Covid-19 pandemic.

While on the phone, he mentioned he was hungry as he'd been stretching out his food to avoid going out and was very low on all the basics. The contact was immediately passed to the local team closest to East Worthing where he lived. The charity's First Response Team contacted John to find out what support he needed.

Support Given

We arranged for someone to collect his prescription and do a doorstep shopping delivery for him the same day.

Our team also arranged for him to get a free welfare box with food and toiletries every other week and organised a volunteer to do a weekly shop for food and essentials and drop it into him.

We provided Connect magazine and activity packs to keep his mind active and to fight boredom while he was isolating at home and provided reusable face masks

to reassure him when he did feel able to leave the house.

Through gentle investigation, we identified that John was very lonely and anxious and referred him internally to the befriending team, who now make regular calls to him.

Our team spent time chatting (socially distanced) on the doorstep when making deliveries as John really missed face to face contact and is also hearing impaired, so sometimes he preferred this to telephone calls.

Outcomes

John is so grateful for the support he received at home, which enabled him to remain connected and retain his independence throughout the pandemic. He was relieved to know there was support on hand and knowing he wouldn't run out of food had a significant impact on his general wellbeing. When he received the first welfare box, topped up with extra donated items, he was beaming, saying "Wow, wow is that for me? It's like Christmas!"

He is looking towards the future and is keen to join the AUKWSBH lunch clubs when they are back up and running and the team will be encouraging him to join any other activity clubs that interest him, when it is appropriate to do so. John is now eating better and benefitting from the regular phone calls he receives. He now feels happier, calmer and more optimistic than when we first met him and he is reassured that our support will continue.