Our activity report for 2020/21

Our volunteer, Phil, delivering food parcels to shielding older people during the first Covid lockdown.

Photo courtesy of the Yorkshire Post

Introduction

The year 2020/21 will be one that none of us will ever forget. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on everyone, in our personal and working lives.

Very sadly, older people suffered by far the greatest health impacts of Covid-19, with people aged 50 and over (and younger people with certain health conditions) accounting for 99% of all deaths from this new and deadly virus.

At Age UK Sheffield, we are hugely proud of the way in which our charity stood up to support the people who needed us during this crisis. Almost overnight, we totally transformed the way we worked. We contacted all the 1,100 people we were supporting at the time and developed an individual plan for how we would help them to live independently whilst shielding from the virus.

Where necessary, on a risk-assessed basis, we continued to deliver home support services in a Covid-secure way throughout all the lockdowns, where we believed that withdrawing our services would put people at a greater risk.

We established and funded, from scratch, an essential food parcel delivery service, within a matter of weeks. And we re-opened the Wellbeing Centre (our dementia day centre) in September, at a time when almost all face-to-face group activity remained closed.

On top of all this, we kept delivering all our existing services, increasing the number of older people we supported compared to previous years, and demonstrating that when older people in Sheffield need us, Age UK Sheffield is a charity they can trust to be with them.

Steve Chu
Chief Executive

May 2021

Who we supported

In total, in 2020/21 we supported 3,879 older people with recorded case work. That is an increase of over 10% compared to the previous year.

The age profile of our beneficiaries went up; for the first time in recent years, we supported more people aged 80-89 than people aged in their Seventies. In all, 80% of our beneficiaries whose age we recorded were aged 70 or over.

Health conditions

We target our work to benefit those who are most in need of support, primarily people who are living with long-term health conditions or multiple long-term conditions.

We believe that, in the majority of cases, this work is reducing demand on statutory health and social care services. For example, our work with over 1,800 people who have mobility issues includes advice and practical measures to minimise their risk of experiencing future falls.

The number of people living with dementia or memory loss we supported increased significantly compared to last year, partly as a result of a specific piece of Covid-related work we were commissioned to undertake in 2020, to make contact with people who had been diagnosed with dementia but were not in contact with statutory services.

A citywide service

Our beneficiaries are well spread throughout Sheffield, although we tend to do the most work in areas where we have our closest relationships with the local GPs.

We have also been pleased to note that we increased the ethnic diversity of our beneficiaries in 2020/21. The proportion who identified as a non-White/British ethnicity increased from 5% to 7%. Our Board is committed to further increasing the diversity of our beneficiaries and has committed to spending from reserves to support this work in 2021/22.

GP feedback

Humphrey Emery, Porter Valley Primary Care Network

We have been working closely with Age UK Sheffield for almost two years to deliver a transformational new service to support elderly and isolated people in our community. Despite the complexities thrown at them by the Coronavirus pandemic, Age UK Sheffield have repeatedly risen to the challenge of delivering community based support to some of our most vulnerable patients.

During the spring of 2020 as a network we were resigned to the fact that our project would be derailed by lockdowns, social distancing and shielding rules. However Age UK Sheffield were not going to let our patients go unsupported. Through their agility, flexibility and unshakable positivity they reconfigured our project to deliver a Covid-secure service through a very difficult time. From a personal point of view, during what was a very tough and uncertain time in primary care, I always came away from my meetings with the Age UK Sheffield team with a renewed feeling of hope for the future and a sense of awe at their “can do” attitude.

Lisa Shackleton, Hillsborough Primary Care Network

We approached Age UK Sheffield in 2020 to see if they could provide a Social Prescribing Link Worker role. Our Link Worker has been invaluable and our Board members recognise that Age UK Sheffield is a well-respected organisation and that our patients are engaging really well. Along with providing support to isolated patients during COVID our Link Worker has been able to secure benefits for patients that were not aware they were entitled to and she has worked closely with patients that are on our dementia register, ensuring that are linked to any services that are available to them.

Emma Reynolds (from the Tramways and Middlewood Medical Centres) added: “Our elderly patients have been especially vulnerable this last year with high levels of isolation and loneliness. Having someone to refer to who can provide a holistic assessment is really useful. Patients will often end up being referred for one problem but finding several others are solved that they had not expected help with. Feedback from patients, relatives and my colleagues has been excellent across the board and I am delighted that we can continue to offer this service to our patients going forward.”

Referring in and out

Of the 3,879 people we supported in 2020/21, roughly half made the initial contact directly to us, whilst around 2,000 people were referred into our services by colleagues in the health, social care or voluntary sectors. 1,146 of the referrals came to us from GP practices across the city.

In the course of our work with these customers, we made over 7,000 connections to more than 1,000 local projects, initiatives, or services, which helped older people to meet identified needs. These connections ranged from financial and consumer advice, to support with health or caring aspirations, to reducing loneliness and social isolation.

Through our expertise in helping people to access unclaimed benefit income, we supported 532 people to increase their income by a total of £2.9 million in the first year. In the majority of cases, they will continue to receive this benefit income for the rest of their lives.

Our funding partners

None of this work would be possible with support from a huge range of funding partners. We remain extremely grateful to all our long-term funders, including Weston Park Cancer Charity, Macmillan Cancer Support, Age UK, Westfield Health, Marjorie Coote Old People's Charity Fund, Sheffield Town Trust, Sheffield Church Burgesses Trust, The Jusaca Charitable Trust, HM Burdall Charity, NHS Sheffield Clinical Commissioning Group (and some local GP Neighbourhoods), Sheffield City Council, and the Energy Saving Trust's Energy Redress Fund. These funders help to give us security in the delivery of our core services.

2020/21 customer feedback highlights

“You have been the one that has helped me the most and you are Age UK and not a health professional. You have been the only one who has explained things to me and talked to me in a way that I would like to be talked to”.

“Huge thank you to Debbie and Mark who helped my brother with the installation of a new refrigerator when his old one broke down during the 12 week lock-down. He is disabled and has leukaemia. Their courtesy, sympathy and empathy are priceless.

“Thank you so much for all your help. It’s taken so much stress and worry away from me knowing that you're there for me when I need it. You've sorted everything out for me. You helped with incorrectly calculated overpayment of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support of over £1500. Got them to recalculate down to 2 pence overpayment.”

“Throughout lockdown mum’s physical and mental health have been of great concern to us and hearing the Centre was reopening was absolutely the best news in months! Personally it’s a massive relief to know that for one day a week worry can be set aside for a few hours in the knowledge she is in a secure environment with caring people who plan appropriate activities and understand her dementia.”

“My mum has dementia and heart failure which means the heart failure limits her exercise capacity and dementia means it can be difficult finding things to stimulate mum. The dementia cafe has been fantastic; and more recently with the Zoom sessions and when mum is even more isolated it provides an opportunity for her to meet people, try new activities and provide some routine to her week.”

“You have been the only person who has called me after being discharged from being in intensive care with Covid. I cannot explain how much it means to me that you have shown me that you and your organisation care.”

“We would like to thank you for all that you have done for us. The caring, friendliness and dedication you have shown us throughout. Nothing has been too much trouble. Every phone call I made has always been returned. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts because without you we would never have been able to complete all the forms. I will always recommend your charity to anyone because you have been wonderful.”

The Old Coach House

We are delighted to say that our final application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for £581,500, to redevelop The Coach House House and Potting Shed in Hillsborough Park was successful.

Building work got under way on 29th March 2021 and has also been made possible by partnership funding from Age UK Sheffield (£100,000), The Bradbury Foundation (£100,000), Wolfson Foundation (£80,000), Clothworkers Foundation (£75,000), Garfield Weston Foundation (£75,000) and Bernard Sunley Foundation (£20,000).

We hope to open these new facilities at the end of 2021.

The Covid-19 pandemic

Our ability to react quickly to meet beneficiary needs has never been better demonstrated than during the Covid-19 pandemic. We knew, before the first lockdown was announced, that some shielding older people would struggle to get food into their home, due to a lack of available friends and family support.

We launched our biggest ever fundraising campaign to deliver essential food parcels to shielding older people. From scratch, we created our first ever food delivery programme, in partnership with St Mary's Church and Community Centre.

In total, we raised over £60,000, enabling our volunteers to deliver 3,298 essential food parcels between 31st March and 31st July. We also carried out some additional emergency shops for people who were living in poverty, or had been diagnosed with Covid-19, and had no food in the house, as well as some other vital deliveries of medication and clothing.

Business as usual

At the time of the lockdown, we were already supporting a caseload of 1,100 older people. We contacted every single one of them to create an updated personal plan to ensure they could live safe and well through the pandemic. Our volunteer befriending programme, In Touch, expanded by 30%, as we prioritised weekly contact with the older people we were most concerned about.

Whilst our face-to-face services were adapted for several weeks, we took a proactive approach to returning our services to normal as soon as possible. Home visiting services continued throughout, on a needs/risk assessment basis. Our dementia day centre re-opened in September and has continued to operate throughout subsequent lockdowns.

Older people, carers, and community partners have recognised that Age UK Sheffield stood up when it was needed in 2020/21 and re-shaped its services to ensure older people got the support they need.

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