

# Covid Response Report

March 2020 – March 2021



Age UK volunteers

# What we did

In March 2020 when the pandemic hit and face-to-face contact had to halt, we faced an uncertainty regarding the future of our charity and concerns over the health and well-being of the people we support. The best part of our services is delivered face-to-face, which meant we had to plan quickly ways we could continue to support the older people of Westminster safely. As more people became aware of the seriousness of the situation our reception line experienced an increase in the level of calls it received from worried and concerned older people, family members and neighbours. In direct response to this we extended our telephone enquiries opening hours by two hours per day. Our enquiry line was able to identify vulnerable older people at risk of social isolation or who had emergency food needs, which at this time was two of the main issues we were helping people overcome. Over the last 12 months we have received 7866 client contacts who we have supported with our various Covid response services and had over 10,000 unique users accessing our website.

**7866 client contacts**  
over the last 12 months

**10,000 unique users**  
accessing our website

## EMERGENCY FOOD PROJECT

We established a relationship with a local Waitrose who kindly donated food parcels which we distributed to our known vulnerable clients on a monthly basis. The need for these emergency food supplies was intense, and we were able to secure funding towards this vital service which enabled us to deliver on a weekly basis. Our Trustees established a relationship with St. John's Church at Hyde Park and they allocated space in the church so we could store the food items, prepare the food parcels and deliver from free of charge. This relationship still continues today. As weeks went by and the pandemic continued, we were able to secure more funding and piloted a "meals to your door" service to support those clients who without their usual support of a carer/family member were unable to prepare themselves a nutritious meal. Since March 2020 we have delivered 2000+ emergency food parcels to 217 unique clients and piloted a prepared-meals-to-your-door service to 40 vulnerable local older adults delivering 960 nutritious meals during the two month pilot period.

**2000+ emergency food parcels**  
delivered since March 2020



Over **345 shops** for our  
**60 registered clients**  
since September 2020

*"I was absolutely delighted with the parcel today from Age UK. The food is very useable and of high quality and included a few treats too. It was delivered to my door by two charming helpers who also offered contact and assistance should I need it in the months to come. Many thanks to Age UK for caring."*

Food parcel recipient

We then recognised the need for people who could afford to shop for their essentials but were unable to do so due to needing to isolate and/or unable to use technology to do their own shopping online. In response to this we were able to secure further

funding and in September 2020 we launched our Weekly Shopping Service. We currently have 60 clients registered for this service and since the launch in September 2020 our volunteers have carried out over 345 shops for these clients.

# TELEPHONE BEFRIENDING AND WELLBEING CHECK AND CHAT SERVICE

*“Mrs X has asked me to pass on her thanks to you for your recent phone call, to check in on how she is doing, she really appreciated your call.”*

Telephone Befriending client

To address the social isolation and loneliness concerns we moved our 101 face-to-face befriending clients to receive telephone befriending and launched this as a Covid Response Service. We had over 450 older people known to us at risk of social isolation and all were offered to receive a befriending call 2-3 times per week. We also identified a further 200 low risk older people who were offered a regular Wellbeing Check & Chat call. We

currently have 556 people receiving a Telephone Befriending call and 465 people receiving a Wellbeing Check & Chat call. Since the launch of the telephone befriending service in April 2020 our volunteers have made over 50,000 calls to our telephone befriending clients to check they were ok, offer regular social contact, establish any other needs and direct them appropriately to other internal and external services.

**465 clients**  
received a Wellbeing  
Check & Chat call

Over **50,000 Befriending Calls**

## ONLINE GROUP ACTIVITIES

*“I wanted to write and thank you and your other Volunteers for organising and conducting our ZSL tour yesterday. It was so lovely to be out and about in nature again. I am so grateful for Age UK Westminster pioneering this visit. I look forward to other visits and even a second one to ZSL.”*

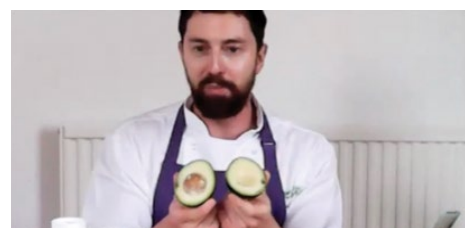
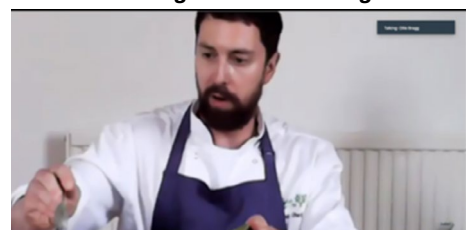
Local resident

**1140 attendees** accessing  
**175 activities**

Our group befriending activities were moved online and accessed via the platform Zoom. We started by delivering ‘tea & chat’, quizzes and chair yoga 2-3 times per week. As we secured further funding, we expanded the variety, number and frequency of activities we delivered and to date we have provided 175 activities with 1140 attendees participating.

When restrictions were lifted, after the first lockdown, we hosted some socially distanced outdoor activities including a Regent’s Park Walk and a visit to London Zoo. Both were very well attended, and clients were happy to be out in the fresh air and enjoyed socialising in person again.

### Online cooking lesson with Roving Chef



# COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING

To help us cope with the demand for these services we scaled up our volunteering recruitment to support with the food parcel, prepared meals and shopping deliveries, prescription collection, telephone befriending and well-being check & chat calls and to support clients accessing the online activities. We saw a considerable increase in demand for volunteering and since March 2020 we have had 432 volunteers actively supporting us to deliver our Covid Response services.

**432**  
**volunteers**

*"It is such a pleasure to be able to assist within my community through acting as a volunteer with Westminster Age U.K, delivering food to older neighbours, many of whom the Covid pandemic has left isolated and unable to go out. Age UK is a very well run and laudable operation, and it has been a great pleasure getting to know the Age UK co-ordinators and other volunteers. Due to online schooling, my young son has been able to help do food deliveries as well. He has found being able to help a very rewarding experience, and he looks forward to assisting with deliveries each week."*

Volunteer helping to deliver a food parcel

## INFORMATION AND ADVICE

**4838**  
**client contacts**  
received by Information & Advice  
service over the last 12 months

*"I didn't know where to turn until my GP referred me to Age UK Westminster. I have a new lease of life and I would recommend Age UK Westminster to all my friends. They have been a Godsend."*

Ms X who was awarded Attendance Allowance at the higher rate of £89.15 a week and a back payment of £445.75. Thanks to our help she was able to get a home help who assisted her with all the daily tasks she was struggling with.

**£583,904**  
**in welfare**  
obtained for our clients

Pre-pandemic our free Information & Advice service was predominately delivered face-to-face with clients either by home visit (for our house/bedbound clients), drop-in surgery in the community or office appointment. Many of our older clients prefer a face-to-face appointment due to the nature of the appointment and improved understanding. All Information & Advice enquiries from March 2020 were dealt by our two-person team over the telephone, via Zoom or video calls on mobile. Many of our clients struggle to hear over the telephone and are unable to and/or don't have access to online channels which has meant some clients appointments have had to be put on hold until face-to-face can be re-established. Over the last 12 months our Information & Advice service has received 4838 client contacts. The issues range from Income maximisation, Housing, Social care, Debt, Advocacy, Consumer Advice, food shopping, food parcel delivery and prescription collection. Since March 2020 we have assisted clients to obtain £583,904 in welfare benefits during this time.

# DIGITAL INCLUSION

With many essential services moving online we secured funding to pilot a Digital Inclusion project to support the differing needs and requirements for older people to become digitally knowledgeable and connected. We discovered knowledge wasn't the only barrier that was preventing older people from using digital technology. There was also the cost implications for the device and broadband, and fear of the unknown. We decided to set up a digital library securing devices donated from local



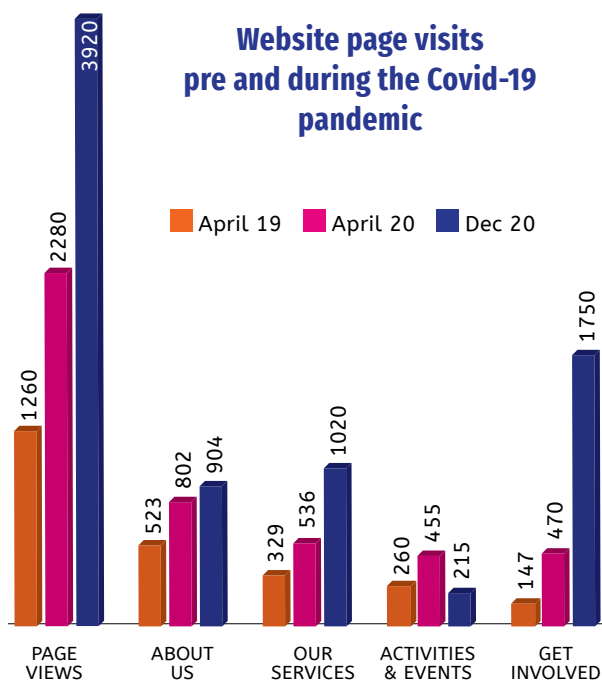
Recipient of the Digital Library Service receiving loan of a laptop and mobile phone

corporates, individuals, Singapore High Commission London as well as funding from trusts and foundations. This allowed free access to loan internet-ready secure equipment. We recruited volunteers who were trained to become "Digital Champions". They were buddied virtually with an individual to provide tailored digital training through one-to-one support and group activities. During the pandemic this was delivered via telephone and online, but as lockdown eases, we have secured further funding to roll this out face-to-face throughout Westminster. During the pandemic we have provided digital support to over 30 older people and provided 18 group training sessions online.

**18**  
group training  
sessions  
provided

*"Thank you so much for arranging the 1-1 last week for me. I managed to log on and thoroughly enjoyed the lesson. Achieving this was my main goal. Please do let me know when time permits when the next opportunity may arise and forward dates and times. Thank you once again, much appreciated."*

Online Digital Inclusion Group Session attendee



The above chart shows the number of visitors to our website during the year prior to the pandemic, the first month into the pandemic and the last lockdown announcement in December 2020.

# COMMUNICATION

Our bi-monthly newsletter switched to a weekly distribution and is currently sent via hand, post and email to our 450+ clients and 180+ professional contacts. The professional contacts include Council members, sheltered blocks, Churches, Housing Trusts/Associations, CLCCG, GP's, Care Navigators, Libraries, Hospitals, Mental Health services, community groups/centres and other charities, who share it with their clients. We have been able to build up many of these relationships and connections during the pandemic.

Over the last 12 months our newsletter has been sent to over 20,000 contacts which helps to keep our

clients informed about our charitable projects and to encourage them to get involved and make use of our services and services within their community. It also helps us to keep our supporters up-to-speed with what we are doing and where their funding is being spent.

We have seen vast increases in numbers of people accessing our website since the pandemic hit and particularly during the last lockdown. The greater percentage of views appeared to be for the Get Involved page (volunteering & donations), Our Services and About Us where our contact details can be located.

# ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PROJECT

For over 15 years Age UK Westminster has delivered a successful Christmas Lunch Project, in collaboration with St Paul's Boys School, which supports isolated older people on Christmas Day by providing them with a festive meal, a gift and a friendly visitor, on what would otherwise be the loneliest day of the year. We are the only organisation in Westminster that delivers to older people at home on Christmas Day.

This year was different as we were faced with a global pandemic, many older people were shielding, and we had Covid-19 guidelines to consider in relation to social distancing and meeting people face-to-face. Also,

the support that we usually received from St. Paul's Boy School was this year not possible.

We felt it was vital to deliver a Christmas Project to spread some much-needed Christmas cheer to the Westminster older residents. A plan was made to deliver a luxury Christmas hamper to individuals on the days running up to Christmas and a befriending call from a volunteer on Christmas day.



*“Christmas alone under tier 4 regulations would have been unmanageable without the advice, support & friendship provided by Age UK Westminster.”*

Local Christmas Hamper recipient



**90 volunteers**  
delivered our Christmas Hamper Project  
to **520 isolated**  
**older people**

The Christmas Hamper Project was a great success! We received support from 93 volunteers, 9 of whom were local councilors and an MP, and 43 corporate volunteers who supported us with packing and delivery of the hampers and friendly calls. The incredible amount of support we received enabled us to deliver a hamper and make a friendly call to 520 isolated older people on the three days running up to Christmas (21st, 22nd and 23rd December), and spread festive cheer amongst the older residents of Westminster.

Many of the volunteers who supported us by making a friendly call wish to continue calling their client on a regular basis and as a result have signed up to become a long-term volunteer Telephone Befriender for our organisation.

*“I had a brilliant time volunteering for Age UK Westminster, it was so great to have the chance to talk to people who were isolated at Christmas and to hopefully spread some cheer.”*

Christmas Hamper volunteer

*“The hamper from Age UK and the telephone call were quite surprising and quite extraordinary and a very unexpected gesture, a very touching gesture, to realise that one is being thought of by someone. With these phone calls and the hamper, I could not have asked for a nicer Christmas.”*

Local Christmas Hamper recipient

# How people benefited from our work?

When we set out on our Covid Response service journey we were initially responding to the needs of our local older community. These needs were to keep them safe, healthy, nourished and socially stimulated, as well as being there to offer information and advice when needed.

Like with any of the services that we provide, we collect client data in order to monitor and evaluate the service delivery, and to ensure it is meeting its aims. In addition to speaking to clients prior to providing a service and collecting their information we also conduct surveys to highlight the impact and benefits the service is providing.

**Through these techniques we have found our Covid Response services have provided the following benefits to our beneficiaries:**



Helped them feel less isolated and lonely though engaging in social activities and befriending



Maximised their income through attaining benefits they were entitled to



Prevented and/or reduced a risk of malnutrition by being provided with a food parcel, prepared meal or shopping service



Increased physical activity by having access to our online exercise offering



Improved their mental health by having access to our varied Covid-19 support services and referral pathways to other organisations and services



Made them feel less digitally excluded and helped them gain improved knowledge and confidence by having access to devices, broadband and volunteer support



Gave purpose and increased skills through our range of volunteering opportunities

We have recently conducted a survey which was sent to all of our existing and past beneficiaries plus the wider community to

- find out more about how we have supported people, what they have accessed, how often
- discover what services they would like to see us provide in the future, and
- identify gaps

We will use these findings to plan how we expand our service delivery to meet our local older communities' needs going forward and to help us secure further funding to deal with the aftermath of the pandemic.

**To conclude** we couldn't have provided the help we have to our community without the support from our funders and dedicated volunteers.

**We hope in 2021** that the outlook for older adults will be better as the vaccination programme hopefully reduces transmission. However, we know many of the social connections older adults had prior to Covid-19 will be broken and will need to be rebuilt and there will be fear and anxiety as restrictions are eased. We plan to support existing and new clients to access our services with confidence as face-to-face delivery is gradually re-established.

### Positives

Covid-19 has had its positives as we have strengthened partnerships with organisations as well as building new ones, mobilised new and existing volunteers and coordinated community level groups in a united Covid-19 response. We also developed new online service offers and increased our IT skills

development services many of which we will continue to offer to clients who are housebound and/or do not wish to join activities in person.

### Digital Inclusion and Digital Library

Covid-19 has starkly highlighted the digital divide within the older population making this one of our priorities and we have already secured a few pots of funding to develop our Digital Inclusion and Digital Library service for the next 12 months. We look to report on our findings from this pilot to continue to develop and secure funding for this much needed service.

### Looking ahead

We have been able to access short term funding to support our response to Covid-19. This has been very beneficial but our concern for 2021 is the impact of this ending and not being replaced and the impact this will have on our organisation and ultimately the people we support.

We will continue to strengthen partnerships with organisations and communities which will enable us to build collaborative partnerships to improve delivery and develop joint funding applications.

We also want to increase our trading income to make us more sustainable, and we have already secured funding for phase 1 of a Paid for Service to provide Basic Footcare and Podiatry, Practical Support, Personal Care and Power of Attorney support to the older people in Westminster.



**Lord Mayor Cllr Jonathan Glanz helping with packing of the food parcels**

