

Here to Help  
Not to Judge



Newsletter 22  
August 2020

Lofty Heights CIC has two clear aims; to improve people's quality of life in their own homes whilst providing jobs and training for local young people.

## Strange Times

### Hello Again.

It seems an age since our last newsletter and in that time, how things have changed. In March when lockdown was announced we were set, reluctantly, to 'shut up shop'. However, several members of our team stepped forward and 'volunteered' to take the 'risk' and continue working in the community so that we could, at least, keep our Homeward Bound Hospital Discharge Service operational and 'Help the NHS'. Quickly, we adapted our service, furloughed all but 3 of our team and focused on our hospital discharge work. You'll read more about this later in this newsletter.

Like others delivering services during this time we faced many challenges such as adapting how we deliver our services, adhering to social distancing, sourcing PPE, difficulties organising waste disposal, charity shop closures, loss of income and dealing with both our vans breaking down in the same week. Some good things have happened too, such as having several opportunities on BBC Radio Suffolk to comment on relevant topics, receiving unexpected crucial emergency COVID-19 funding through The Suffolk Community Foundation and other things that you can read about below.



Throughout lockdown we continued to receive desperate requests for help from people experiencing difficulties because their homes were becoming more cluttered and chaotic due to difficulties in getting rid of accumulated rubbish or food waste from many months of take away food being delivered and meals not fully eaten, not helped by hot weather and flies... get the picture.....

We responded by reopening our de-cluttering services in June, followed by gardening and house clearance services.

We were unable to celebrate our **8th Birthday** in our usual way, when we invite friends, customers, and supporters we want to thank, to tea and cake in the garden, but we look forward to a double celebration next year, not only of our birthday but getting through and surviving these strange times.

I want to take this opportunity to say THANKS to our brilliant, supportive team for their dedication and commitment to getting things done, often under difficult circumstances and without complaint. WELL DONE. I am proud of you all.

I also want to thank The Suffolk Community Foundation for their help at this time.

I hope you enjoy learning more about what we have been up to and that it won't be quite so long before our next newsletter. All the best.

**Olive Quinton CEO**

## We Are Open

**Our Services:** We are so pleased that our services are fully open carrying out assessment visits, complex declutter work, house and garden clearance, alongside our Homeward Bound Service. We also endeavour to facilitate those awkward small jobs that can be difficult to find someone to do – you know we like a challenge. We cover the whole of Suffolk – sneaking over all of the neighbouring borders (at least a little) when the need arises. That is a lot of ground to cover, but we always try our best to help as many people as possible.



### Service Adaptations

Working within the government guidance for **COVID-19 Secure Working** we have introduced some changes to keep our staff and customers safe.

**Buddy System:** because the teams travel together to get to jobs, we cannot social-distance inside a van. We have divided the team into three pairs. Each pair forms a bubble. They only work with their buddy and because of this we have introduced staggered start and finish times so that they can keep their distance from the other pairs of buddies (or bubbles).

**Pros** – This instils great team working. We have had amazing feedback from the teams and customers alike. Our buddies have been able to have their own dedicated vans, reducing risks of cross-contamination, and by working with each other consistently they have formed their own methods and patterns for getting the job done efficiently and effectively.

**Cons** – It does mean that for now, we have no single workers to carry out one-to-one work. This has the greatest impact on our sensitive declutter work, as it is this type of work that Georgina, our Declutter Officer, would normally do. It also means that if one buddy becomes ill their buddy must also self-isolate or if one of the pair wants to take holiday, they have to synchronise this with their buddy. It means that we may not be able to book jobs as quickly as we once were, so we ask that you bear with us and understand if things take a bit longer. However, rest assured we still work to our same high standards.

**PPE** –We are fully equipped with gloves, suits, and masks. Sourcing PPE has at times been challenging and prices have doubled. If additional, specialist PPE is required for people being referred please let us know as we may have to source additional PPE or ask those referring to provide specialist items if we are unable to do so.

### Social Distancing

When taking referrals we ask if customers or households have COVID-19 or had it. We also ask if potential customers understand and can adhere to social distancing.

These changes will remain in place for the foreseeable future so please bear with us.

## Homeward Bound Hospital Discharge Service

Thank you to our Homeward Bound Teams. They carried out 112 jobs, moving furniture to create space for hospital beds and mobility aids and cleaning kitchens, bathrooms and toilets so that care could be provided in the home, ensuring that patients were able to get home from hospital quickly or stay out of hospital during lockdown. That's an approximate accumulated cost saving of £44,800 to the NHS for a single day of preventing delayed discharges or hospital admissions. We know that it is unlikely that discharges are delayed by only one day so the cost saving to the NHS because of our Homeward Bound Service is likely to be much more!!

Thank you to Dave and Shab (left hand picture). They were our lock-down team until May. Thank you also to Georgina and Ian (right hand picture, in case you couldn't guess) they took over on 11<sup>th</sup> May and are still in place.



Thank you to the Suffolk Community Foundation. They provided COVID-19 Relief Funding that enabled us to purchase a supply of key safes (as modelled by Dave and Shab) and a rechargeable drill. This has meant that we can reduce the number of trips we make to hospitals returning keys to patients, saving time, reducing risk of infection and means care can be started more quickly speeding up patient discharge from hospital

## Going Forward (Sometimes in Spacesuits)

Lofty Heights has gone from this:



to this:



Meet Georgina and Ian, they are the current Homeward Bound Team and modelling some of the PPE required on certain jobs. They took over the Homeward Bound Service shortly before lockdown restrictions were lifted, taking over from Dave and Shab who have now returned to their regular work. Georgina is actually our Declutter Officer; her skills are being honed on a service that works within a four-hour time frame for solving most issues within a home. This is like speed dating for cleaning and decluttering.

## **Bad News/Good News**

During lock-down we suffered an almost catastrophic disaster. Both of our vans broke down in the same week. This left us to carry out our work in our old donated Honda car (Rhonda). After a complex repair to our newest van (Percy) we had to say a sad farewell to our old faithful Vauxhall Vivaro, (Lofty) as it made its final journey to the scrap yard.

This was a bitter blow as we had fundraised hard many years ago to acquire this vehicle and it had carried us over 150,000 miles all over Suffolk and beyond, helping vulnerable people. Luckily, the problem with our Percy van was fixable but there was a delay obtaining parts due to the lock-down. This was a bad time and as we were working out how on earth we were going to manage with only one van we had an amazing offer.



Through social media Europcar learned of our plight and, because we are supporting the NHS through our Homeward Bound Hospital Discharge Service, they decided to give us the loan of not one but two vans until the end of December 2020.

As you can see, they were presented to us in a safe and socially-distanced responsible way. This offer allows us time to find a more permanent solution to our problem and gives us the breathing space to prepare and manage. It has also meant that there was no discernible break in our services.



**Thank you Europcar, from us and all of our customers.**

## **Ipswich Borough Funding Report**

Last year we applied for funding from the Ipswich Borough Council Community Chest and received £2000. We have just been writing a report on how we used this funding and it is a delight to know that we made some amazing things happen for vulnerable people in Ipswich who without this grant we would not have been able to help.

So, in 12 months we:

- Cleared a garage for a lady with mobility issues
- Provided a deep clean for a gentleman recovering from addiction and despite having several support workers was unable to secure funding for a fresh start.
- Helped a resident with mental health issues make space in her home to begin her social enterprise that she hopes will further support her local community.
- Helped a lady with mobility and health issues to move to more suitable accommodation. See her story below

### **Case Study**

Mrs A had been known to us for a while. With a history of hoarding behaviour linked to multiple bereavements, we had worked with her previously. Her social landlord has been supremely supportive throughout her tenancy, and had been instrumental in enabling our services to be brought in.

When Mrs A made the difficult decision to move from her rented home of 15 years to a sheltered property, she called us. She had no idea how she could afford to pay for the work required. With a number of health issues that deeply affected her mobility and stamina she needed help to pack up her home and prepare to move.

We knew that although she had some life-limiting conditions, she was not under the care of any support team or social worker. This is a barrier to funding for many people. She was, however, an Ipswich Borough resident moving to another property within the Ipswich locality. We allocated a day's funding for our team to prepare for the move. We packed up all her belongings and that was all we were expected to do.



### **BUT we actually did a whole lot more...**

- We contacted the Housing Benefit team on Mrs A's behalf, and obtained a Discretionary Housing payment for her removal costs.
- Decluttered and helped her make decisions about limiting the volume of belongings she would take to her new, smaller, sheltered property so that she did not start off living in a cluttered home.
- Did her removal and spent time with her setting up her home.

Mrs A has improved her living conditions by moving to a single level property fitted with the adaptations she has required for years. Her important stuff, kitchen and personal items, have been unpacked and put away, and her furniture laid out to create as much space as possible. Because we understand people's priorities, we even set up her television before we left. We believe that careful packing and planning allows for a more successful move, enabling a far more sustainable tenancy.

This is one example of how we can support people in need. Those not under the care of any statutory services and, therefore, without access to support or funding opportunities to access services that would, otherwise, be prohibitive due to the costs. It is unbelievable the things we can achieve when we are allowed to be flexible in how we use grants. Thank you IBC.

## **Love in a time of COVID-19**

It has been a scary time for all. Whilst the media has been busy reporting all that we have lost, we want to report of some amazing stuff that happened during lock-down.

- We've already mentioned the 112 Homeward Bound referrals that we completed. We also did four complex declutters, where the person was unable to get home from hospital due to the condition in their homes.
- We had help from Suffolk Community Foundation to buy key safes and a rechargeable drill, they also gave us a grant for additional PPE and other unexpected COVID-19 related costs. Some of that money was needed to counter the huge price-jack of PPE supplies, especially gloves. Pre-COVID we paid £5.99 per box of 100 gloves, now it is between £15-20 for the same box.
- We also had the news that our carers grant application was successful. Our previous Breathing Space Project has helped 45 carers so far since it began in May 2019. So, we are delighted our work with carers can continue

### **Breathing Space - How Does it Work?**

If you are an adult caring for another adult, living in the same home, you can qualify for one day's 'free' help from Lofty Heights CIC. We will carry out any practical tasks that you need doing within your home and garden.



### **What do we ask in return?**

That you agree to being part of a follow up programme.

We will make a number of contacts with you, firstly to find out how you are and how your feeling. After we have completed work for you, we find out what difference this has made. We then provide information and signposting that you might need, and finally seek your views about how we could improve or adapt our services that could make a difference to you and other carers. All with the intention of helping carers to continue in their caring roles, especially at this time when support groups and other forms of support are unavailable or restricted. We know that our type of practical work, everything from handyman jobs to declutters, have been gratefully received by carers in the past but can we do more? That is the question.

### **Finding 'hidden' and new 'carers'**

One of the unexpected outcomes of our Homeward Bound Service is that we find a huge number of carers. Some of them have been caring for many years, while others have had this incredibly daunting task thrust upon them suddenly. We are often the first person that they talk to in this new role. Often, they have to make huge changes to their home for a person with new needs, have no idea about who to ask for help, or even what help they need.

The parameters of our Breathing Space funding causes some difficulty with many groups we would like to help such as, 'sandwich carers'. Adults sandwiched between caring for young children and older parents, young carers, under 18's carrying out a caring role for a parent, and carers of disabled children and young adults. Talk to us if this affects you.

At Lofty Heights we are proud of many things including advocating and campaigning on behalf of family carers. Using opportunities when we speak to colleagues at Suffolk County Council, local authorities, and The Suffolk Community Foundation to raise awareness of issues that we come across regularly. We want to enable these vulnerable groups to have a voice, you can help by talking to us. What do you want? When do you want it? How will it make a difference? Tell us and we will try to make it happen

## **Finally: Hope For the Future**



Our one hope, as we emerge from this crisis, is that we can uphold the breakthrough in genuine partnership working with local public services. We have been talking about partnership working and 'co-production' for a few decades now, but this year has seen real evidence of responsive change.

Great institutions, from the government to the NHS, have changed policy and implemented emergency plans overnight, leaving us in the VCSE sector to say 'Aha! We knew it was possible.' Decision making happening in an instant, an 'act now, sort it out later' process has become the new normal, whilst appointments and support are provided online or 'virtually', ripping out months of delays from previous processes. The same is happening with funding decisions.

The trading restrictions during the lockdown have left a chasm in VCSE fundraising capabilities, loss of trading income and uncertainty about the future, but we think (hope) that the reliance on the VCSE to fill gaps, prop up and support public services during times of crisis may be viewed with more understanding and appreciation. Now that we have seen what **can** happen, let us not accept that 'change takes time' ever again.

None of us know what the future hold, but working together for the benefit of vulnerable people of Suffolk is a great hope for the future.

**Stay Safe, Stay Well from all of us at Lofty Heights CIC.**

### **August 2020**

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