

# Spotlight on: Stories from Community Support Organisations and the people involved with them



Building on the Community section in the Director of Public Health Annual Report 2021-2022, we're sharing here some more of people's experiences of working with and having support from the Community Support Organisations during the pandemic.

*\*Some names have been changed in these stories, for confidentiality purposes*

## Carers Plus Yorkshire and Ryedale Carers Support: Mutual Aid – Supporting Rural Communities in Ryedale through the Community Support Organisation

The development of a responsive and inclusive Community Support Organisation and pandemic response was always going to be a challenge in an area where there is a mixed economy, a broad demographic, hidden deprivation, urban populations alongside hyper rural communities – but Ryedale had it all. Our response needed to be flexible, open, dynamic and driven by a partnership that placed all partners on an equal footing to 'get the job done'. The unique triangle of response between North Yorkshire County Council, the local District Council and the Community Support Organisation

brought together a significant wave of response from many organisations, groups, charities and individuals with a single focus. From all corners of the district, formally and informally, the ambition was to ensure no Ryedale resident was without support if they needed it, or wanted it. The movement of mutual aid groups ensured all streets (and single houses where streets didn't exist), were covered – an active network of lifelines that connected together, supported along the chain by the next 'man', and most importantly carrying vital messages and aid to those that needed it the most.

## Stories from the Grassington Hub

**My experience of the pandemic – Carol**  
The positive experience for me is probably to do with developing positive relationships with others in the community, using my strengths to help overcome problems people were facing, resulting in feeling valued. For example: being thanked for the befriending phone calls I was making and knowing people looked forward to receiving them; and knowing that the books I packed and that were then delivered to people self-isolating were very much appreciated. Simply spending time chatting to people in more depth when out walking enriched my connection to my community. This was further enhanced by people making contact when seeking help and advice, whether informally or formally through my volunteering role at Grassington Hub. Finally, experiencing how pleased people were when the Hub reopened its doors to the public, and how cherished the Hub and its volunteers are, was very inspiring and motivating.

**My experience of the pandemic – Barbara**  
It made me feel nervous, and I avoided large gatherings, but then you quickly become used to the situation, and alter your habits accordingly. We were lucky in that everyone stopped for a quick chat on their daily walks, so I didn't feel so isolated. It was memorable in that it's a situation that has not happened before in my lifetime, but memorable with the amazing work by scientists. I am not sure that things have changed for the better, people are more reluctant to go out to events, and have got used to staying at home. I would like to see people returning to volunteering in pre-pandemic numbers. I am not really making any changes (as a result of the pandemic), apart from not travelling abroad to avoid the airport chaos. Having a good bubble of friends has kept us all going and is still keeping us going.

**My experience of the pandemic – Valerie**  
The Hub were very helpful. My husband was poorly and then I became poorly too. They delivered our prescriptions and dropped off food and newspapers. The ladies who came were lovely, and always had time for a chat. It was a very tiring and unhappy time for me, but the friendly ladies made it a better experience, with a little bit of light. When my husband died the people from the Hub telephoned me and checked I was okay, and one of the ladies still pops round to check up on me even though I don't need help with my shopping and prescriptions now. The way people who we didn't know were prepared to help us is something I will always remember and treasure. I am getting out and about now, and take the time to check on my neighbours, something I would not have thought much about before the pandemic. I know it is a small change but I think how important it was to me when I needed help.

## Stories from Revival North Yorkshire (North York Moors)

**Julia and Frank, Revival Participants**  
Julia and Frank are in their 70s and live in a housing association bungalow in Staithes, a small coastal village on the edge of the North York Moors. Both have long term health conditions. They have a son and daughter who live within 15 miles, however they also have health issues which prevent them supporting their parents as much as they would like to. Before the pandemic Julia and Frank enjoyed Revival's activities including the monthly sessions of Memory Lane Lunch and Music. They also enjoyed the Good Old Days reminiscing with vintage memorabilia, particularly when we introduced the Alexa for a sing-song. During lockdown Julia in particular has some health issues and, being a very sociable person, really missed interacting with people. The Revival's Community Support Worker for the area made regular phone calls to the couple and doorstep visits when possible. "Revival has been extremely helpful in lots of ways. Delivering food and groceries, transporting us to Musical Memories and lunches. Keeping in touch to see if we need anything. We have enjoyed singing and trips. Everybody is very helpful and kind. We would miss them greatly if they were not there". Julia and Frank always have a hot meal when Revival's staff and volunteers delivered Lunch on Legs during lockdown and enjoy our In Touch magazine which has featured Julia's garden and Frank's bees. *"Revival rings us up to see if we are alright. They call to see us to bring meals. We always know they are there for us both. We cannot speak more highly of them and we would miss them if they were not there".* Revival held a Gardening Competition in the summer. Julia's garden won and she and Frank came to our office at Danby Fire Station to collect her gift voucher for a garden centre from our local Councillor. *"The competition was a real treat"* says Julia. *"We always know that Revival is here for both of us. We cannot speak highly enough of them and would miss them greatly if they weren't there. No one could have done any better for us."*

**Enid, Revival Participant**  
My name is Enid and I am 86 years old. I live alone in a bungalow in the village of Sleights. I have several long-term health conditions, a heart condition, vertigo, osteoporosis and COPD which affects my breathing and this means I need to have oxygen several times a day. My daughter visits when she can but also suffers from ill health. When I moved to Sleights, I was invited to Revival's Memory Lane Lunches and met some new friends. I met Frank and Julia and I still buy Frank's lovely honey from his own bees. Throughout Covid I have had lots of support from Revival's staff and volunteers. Jill is a fabulous volunteer who phoned me twice a week, every week, Tuesdays and Thursdays – we have a lovely chat and even though lockdowns have ended Jill still phones twice a week and I look forward to her calls. Staff and volunteers delivered shopping to my door every 2 weeks throughout lockdowns and also brought prescriptions if I needed them. We got Lunch on Legs every month – volunteers deliver us a hot meal to the door – it was nice to see a smiling face and not have to cook tea. Although I can use a computer a little, I had never used Zoom before and Katie, Revival's technical helper explained, very patiently, over the phone how to use it. This has been marvellous through lockdowns as I have been able to do Chair Exercises on Zoom and the Moors Walk with the National Park where we have seen lots of different moorland villages in our area from our own sitting room – and we get to chat to other people on the walk too, Davy, who does the walk, always makes us laugh. It's even better now that lockdowns have all been lifted, instead of just standing on the doorstep, Tina, Revival's Support Worker, can come into the house when she calls – last week her and a young man from the village came to put up a table and chairs for me. A few months ago, my television broke – I don't really have anyone I can ask for this sort of thing so Tina asked a volunteer to help. By the next day I had bought a new one and Graham set it all up for me – amazing! I also had six weeks of 1:1 exercise at home with Janette who does Revival's chair exercises – that really helped with my balance. There is a Move On exercise class in Church House that we can all go to now so we can have a bit of fun at the end of the class when we throw the beach ball around! I had to stop driving recently and even though it's not far to class I wouldn't be able to get there at all if Revival didn't organise my transport every week. The others play dominoes after but at the moment I am a little bit too tired to stay. We had Fish and Chips together in the hall last month, it was the first Memory Lane Lunch since Covid began, and Debbie brought some old stuff, an old ironing board and flat irons and some old photos, we had a laugh and a sing song! I really enjoy reading the articles in our In Touch magazine, especially the Grumpy Old Man – I have asked who he is but nobody will say!!

*"We always know that Revival is here for both of us. We cannot speak highly enough of them and would miss them greatly if they weren't there. No one could have done any better for us."*

**Julia**

## Stories from Skipton Step into Action

**Terry, a Skipton Step Into Action client**  
*A bit about Terry's history:*  
Terry had a stroke in 2013, causing a variety of other health problems and reducing Terry's mobility significantly – contributing to various falls in the years since and other complications. Before his stroke, Terry was very active – even volunteering mountaineering support to children when he was younger. He is incredibly positive despite his difficult recent history, but the isolation during the pandemic, and lack of NHS availability for his physical rehabilitation, compacted his health issues and affected him mentally somewhat. He often comments that he feels like the *"last man at the edge of the planet"*. I have been involved in supporting Terry for almost a year.

**Terry's story**  
I felt well supported by my neighbours, friends and Skipton Step Into Action during the pandemic, and I was particularly impressed by how everyone worked as a team to support me in carrying out tasks when I couldn't leave the house. I have my friend who owns a local convenience shop who went out of his way to bring me shopping and I had a neighbour who was always helping me do little bits around my house. I also had the great support of Skipton Step Into Action who got my prescriptions and bits of shopping, but who also chatted to me which really helped me feel less lonely. All this help made me feel less isolated, but it was a real learning curve for me. I have always been independent and I don't want to be a burden to people. So it was difficult at first to ask for and receive help. But just the simple contact with others made me feel human and not just like I'd been left behind. I contributed to this positive experience by paying it forward. I do what I can for others as well; it's like a big circle. It's the small things – my neighbour wanted to store her bread in my freezer because she doesn't have one. If you are able to help someone, you absolutely should. I think the pandemic and aftermath showed that people need to pull together more. It's the small things you can do to show that you are thinking of others. It's a big lesson; we need each other and mankind too often forgets that.

We need to make sure that now things are getting back to normal, we try not to forget that lesson as we so often do when something blows over. We need to listen to people more; we were always designed to be a collective and not an individual. I have always been resilient but the experience of no longer being able to rely on your own body as much has been difficult. I get frustrated with myself; I'm trying my best to remain self-sufficient. But with help, I have managed to get out a few times and I'm determined not to be stuck in so much anymore, I just needed to gain some confidence.

**Sarah, Skipton Step into Action volunteer**  
Volunteering since the start of the Pandemic (March 2020) has been really rewarding, satisfying and I have loved having the opportunity to make a difference in the community I call home. I had absolutely no control of the larger issue i.e. the pandemic, but could help support people at this time with their wellbeing. I felt I could offer one less worry in the grand scheme of things, such as ensuring people had their essential shopping for the week, checking in with people over the phone to make sure they knew they were not alone. My roles were varied and I adopted more specific roles as I felt more comfortable and my confidence grew. This included collecting and delivering shopping and prescriptions, friendly phone calls, walk and talk, fundraising, coordinating projects and accompanying clients. I felt that my "buzz" and enthusiasm really helped others. Clients helped me too, for example, Mary helped me set up Zoom to access the online community (something I really struggled with). Others really helped at this challenging time by their exceptional teamwork – like-minded people, selfless people brought the community together. I recall quite a few memorable moments; in particular the first time I could share a drink with Mary in her back garden to celebrate her 50th birthday. This was a very special time. I recognised there were so many things I'd previously taken for granted and felt extremely grateful for the opportunity to meet with others.

**Mary, Skipton Step into Action client**  
The pandemic has been an extremely challenging time for me as a single parent, alone all day and caring for my son with special needs. My parents were not allowed to visit at this time because of restrictions and my Mum was really poorly – she nearly died of Covid-19. The 'not knowing' was very difficult, I tried to be hopeful but then there were more and more lockdowns. I felt on edge a lot of the time and quite fearful of the unknown. I felt unsafe shopping and concerned I might pick up Coronavirus and pass this on to my son. I felt safe and extremely supported by Skipton Step into Action and the adult company had a really positive impact on my wellbeing. Volunteers collected and delivered my shopping, accompanied me to litter picking activities and invited me to projects. The most memorable moment for me was having birthday drinks in my garden with Skipton Step into Action volunteers – having a laugh and appreciating the company and friendships of and feeling some sense of freedom. When the situation calmed down and I felt safer and the risk was reduced, I wanted to give back and so I joined Skipton Step into Action as a volunteer in September 2021. I helped collect other people's shopping at this stage and joined the online communities. I helped deliver the hampers at Christmas too. I found other volunteers to be friendly and bubbly, showing a whole lot of kindness. I will never forget the time a volunteer dropped off my shopping, she had brought a flask of coffee with her and she sat on my doorstep and listened to my son read. This was a very special moment. I've realised that "Out of bad, comes good" and I would never have met such fabulous ladies if it wasn't for this situation.



## Stories from Sherburn in Elmet CSO

**Sherburn in Elmet volunteer**  
During the pandemic I helped (worked seems to be the wrong word!) in the call centre for our large village/ small town of about 8000 people. As well as my time in the call centre I also became involved in practical tasks such as delivering shopping or prescriptions to vulnerable residents. We provided help and assistance to residents who lacked local or family support and we also helped to coordinate the Covid response in surrounding villages. Being involved made me feel that I was helping (even if only in a small way) at a time when we faced an unprecedented challenge. I was just one person in a large team of volunteers and it was rewarding to work with a group of like-minded people who understood the challenge and wanted to ensure that vulnerable people in our community were not forgotten. I was involved in quite a wide range of tasks, but I have to say (and somewhat to my surprise) that helping in the call centre was the most rewarding part of this. You were speaking either directly to anxious residents or to relatives who lived too far away to assist. Being able to assure them that help was available and hearing the relief in their voices was quite a humbling experience. It brought home the difficulties and stress which many people suffered during this crisis and I know that we played a part in helping relieve that stress for many local residents.

**Sherburn in Elmet case study**  
Part of our work as the responsible body during the Covid-19 crisis was ensuring that everyone throughout the area knew how and where they could access information, advice, low level practical, emotional or social support and/or be signposted to appropriate specialist services to enable them to stay as happy, healthy and independent as possible. To connect with local residents, we made information accessible (via social media, local radio, delivering 7000 leaflets, community posters etc) in a timely manner, offering choice, enabling people to make informed decisions which were right for them and suited their circumstances and needs. Mr and Mrs X received one of our information leaflets through their letterbox and Mr X decided to give us a call. Mr X explained that he and his wife were both 90 years of age, clinically vulnerable and Mr X is a carer for his wife who has Alzheimer's and poor mobility. They have no family living close by. Mr X requested shopping and medication support for a couple of weeks because they were "struggling to cope". The same volunteer assisted with these tasks over the next three weeks and Mr X asked if this support could continue due to their continuing difficulties, but also because he had been able to gain confidence in the consistent support provided and even commenting "you shop like me" as the volunteer was always mindful to advise him if something was on offer to enable their money to stretch as far as possible.

We also ordered and collected replacement hearing aid batteries as required. When the initial Covid lockdown ceased, Mr X assisted his wife to go the hairdressers and on returning home they found that their home had been broken into and they had been burgled. Mr X had rung the Police and then he rang us to "let you know" – (perhaps we are the 4th emergency service). Within the hour a volunteer and one of our call-centre advice team had visited them at their home to check if they needed any assistance, emotional support or practical help to ensure that their home was made safe and secure again. Mr X said *"you have been so kind, we are very reassured that we have support and are being looked after"*. Mr X then asked about Meals on Wheels, saying, *"my wife used to do all the cooking and I try my best but it's not the same"*. A two course hot meal is now delivered every Wednesday lunch-time and Mr X looks forward to having a chat with the volunteer too. As time progressed, the volunteer offered to sit with Mrs X whilst Mr X did their shopping, and although not yet confident enough to do this, he is looking forward to them both being able to re-connect with their local community through participating in the supported "shop and chat" service. Mr X said, *"Thank you for all you have done and continue to do, you are all so kind"*.

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**Mr X**