



...a major community effort to support those isolated or housebound

Rev Arwen Folkes, vicar of East Blatchington and Bishopstone, Seaford, sprang into action just before nationwide lockdown began. Repurposing an old Facebook group, originally set up to assist in a past flooding season, she soon had hundreds of volunteers coming forward.

A partnership grew between the town's churches, people in the community and councillors across the political spectrum, some of whom had never even met, other than online.

Using an old landline number, listed with St Peter's Church, thousands of leaflets were created and delivered to every household in the town.

Seaford Volunteer Emergency Team now runs an 8am to 8pm emergency helpline, seven days a week. Residents can also ask for help via the website.

Requests for help answered have included grocery shopping, collecting medicines, providing heaters, lawn mowers, collections to and from GP surgeries, and even just a friendly voice on the phone for those struggling in self-isolation.

The vicar at the centre of it all, Arwen Folkes said: "I have met more people from across the community in the last few weeks than I have since arriving here a year ago. It has been incredible to see the level of goodwill that has emerged and to be able to use the church resources, alongside the time and energy of others, to channel that compassion and charity in the right and safest directions."

Statistics

- By April 21 the helpline had received 1,300 calls on the helpline (launched on March 28) with at least 840 requests for help
- 200 volunteers signed up offering to do collections, deliveries, shopping
- 50 volunteers are ready for the next phase "listening ear" service
- 11,000 households have received a leaflet
- The Facebook group has 1,388 members
- £8,200 has been provided in funds to help pay expenses such as personal protective equipment, cash flow for shopping and card readers, phone line
- A bespoke web app and database system was created and donated by Hot Horse Ltd which enabled SVET to manage the immense goodwill that came from across the town

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