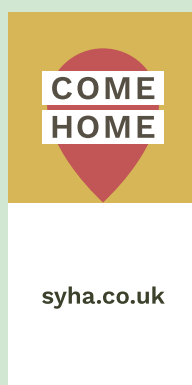


Seven ways we have been stepping up our offer in response to Covid-19

A report from South Yorkshire Housing Association

May 2020



We are now seven weeks into lockdown – a period unlike any other we have known.

We set out some principles at the outset to guide our work:

- We would not be steered away from our purpose – with South Yorkshire Housing Association you can settle, live well and realise your potential. This purpose continues to be our guiding light despite the external challenges.
- Covid-19 brings constraints and things we cannot do, but we decided early on to focus on what we can do for our customers and communities.
- We would focus on where can be of maximum service, and provide the things our customers most want and need from us right now.
- We would work hard to mitigate the risks of lockdown – declining mental health, social isolation and poor physical health.

We work with 20,000 customers at South Yorkshire Housing Association.

We are proud of the work of our customers and people in our business during this crisis. Here are seven ways we've been reshaping and stepping up our work as we come through Covid-19 together.

1. Getting more boots on the ground

Our Volunteering Team has been essential in our response to the coronavirus outbreak. They have worked tirelessly to provide people across our region with the support they need.

Within two weeks of lockdown we had recruited an army of 71 new volunteers: 30 of these were South Yorkshire Housing Association customers. The team created a text service so people could access urgent support.

Our volunteers have been carrying out three key roles:

- Community responders – Picking up prescriptions, food shopping, dog walking and other daily tasks to help our customer.
- Community connection volunteers – Running activities to help customers remain active and connect with each other.
- Telephone buddies – Providing a regular phone call to someone who is isolated, lonely and in need of support.

Our team have capacity to offer support to other organisations across the region.

2. Bringing joy

At South Yorkshire Housing Association we believe that all humans have a right to beauty and joy, even in the most difficult circumstances.

Over the last six years, our Moments of Joy programme has organised a wide range of activities including dance and music sessions, theatre workshops, film screenings, ceramic workshops, theatre performances, gardening redevelopments, unique art commissions and more.

As we go through Covid-19, the need for joy and culture is greater than ever. Here are some of the things we've been doing:

- Running digital book groups and shared reading sessions.
- Hosting balcony choir and singing sessions for our residents in Extra Care Housing.
- Offering musical and dance performances in the grounds of Extra Care Housing.
- Supplying arts and crafts materials and running weekly activities for our supported housing customers.

3. Getting digital

Lockdown and social distancing put significant constraints on face-to-face support for our customers.

Our organisation is built on a deep respect for human connection: we were determined not to let the lockdown prevent us from connecting with our customers, particularly at a time where there is increased risk of poor mental wellbeing.

We've worked hard to make sure that the telephone and online support we are offering to customers living in the community is as rich as it can be.

- Our Trauma Informed Counsellor has been providing online and phone counselling to our Housing First customers.
- We have increased contact time with those with a mental health diagnosis, those using homeless services and older people living in the community. We have continued to run keywork sessions online or by phone. We see this as critical to mitigating the indirect impacts of Covid-19 such as increased poor mental health, financial insecurity and social isolation.

- Our teams have been creative in setting up online sessions which provide what our customers tell us they most need - from virtual social groups and games nights to running virtual 'Clean Together' sessions for customer seeking support with household chores.
- We've made sure that our social housing is ready and available for the people that need it the most. Our lettings have continued and our team are set up to carry out virtual viewings where needed.
- Our Work and Health team have been providing online coaching to customers looking for a job in the current climate.

“Thank you for the phone call last week, the CV tips and overall well-being talk we had.

It was definitely a great help to keep me going and inspired with everything that's going on.”

A Good Work customer

Case study: mental health

Every week we support hundreds of people across the region with their mental health through our services like Lister, Take Notice, Connect 3, Beaufort, Browning Court and Burns Court.

The impact of Covid-19 on mental health is nationally recognised as a huge and growing risk. We have worked hard to sustain our mental health support despite the constraints.

4. Doing the basics brilliantly

In times of crisis people need simple things done consistently well – shelter, safety and food. This principle is enshrined in our purpose.

We have worked hard over the last seven weeks to make sure every customer of South Yorkshire Housing Association has a route to having basic needs met and that nobody slips through the net.

- We are in regular contact with over 500 of our general housing association customers aged over 70 to check on their welfare, see if there's anything they need and deliver essential supplies to their door.
- Our rents team have ramped up support to customers who are experiencing changes in their circumstances, and need help to navigate the process of Universal Credit.
- We have delivered home learning packs, toys and books to the children in our Cuthbert Bank service for homeless families.

- Our LiveWell at Home service supports older people living independently. The service makes wellbeing calls to over 275 people, whether they have other support in place or not, to make sure there is a familiar voice they can speak to at least once or twice a week. In addition, the team carry out an average of 50 doorstep calls a week with 3/4 being for food shopping and medication. Given the challenges for this group we have worked hard to accelerate new referrals into our service, and have increased support for hospital discharge.
- Our housing maintenance teams have worked hard to make sure our properties are repaired to a lettable standard, so we can continue to provide much needed housing.
- Our Neighbourhood Environmental Action Team have been out and about across all our larger housing estates to keep them well maintained and spaces that people feel proud to be part of.
- We continue to carry our emergency repairs to our homes within lockdown constraints.
- We've been providing food deliveries in our supported housing schemes to ensure people have access to good nutrition.

5. Tackling social isolation

We see social isolation as one of the most significant risks of the current crisis.

The term ‘social distancing’ is a misnomer – we need to physically distance to control the virus – but there has never been a time when we needed more social connection and support.

This principle has been central to our work over the last seven weeks.

- We’ve adapted the activity calendar in our supported housing services so that activities can be enjoyed by customers from their windows or socially distancing in the gardens.
- Our Beaufort service has started a mini-magazine so that customers can share news, artwork, tips and music playlists.
- We’ve partnered with schools so that local children can write to residents in our Extra Care Housing.
- Our social prescribing services have supported over 500 customers – linking them into sources of connection in their local communities.
- Daily coffee mornings have been run from the balconies of Extra Care Housing.

6. Keeping active

Government lockdown measures have gone a long way to contain Covid-19, but they leave many of our customers at risk of declining physical health and rising health needs post-crisis.

We've been taking steps to mitigate this risk:

- Hosting garden exercise and dance sessions.
- Encouraging customers to make use of their daily exercise time.
- Running virtual gardening sessions so people are active and spend time in nature.
- Delivering activity packs to customers which include guidance on how to stay active at home.

7. Recognising the power of people and community

Covid-19 has been a national reminder of the power communities and individuals to drive change quickly and with humanity. We hope that the legacy of the crisis will be a greater respect for the part that people and communities play in keeping the nation healthy and well.

At SYHA our route through the crisis has only been possible by the combined efforts of our customers and workforce.

We would like to conclude by acknowledging the huge efforts of our customers in supporting South Yorkshire Housing Association.

- Our customers have adopted and supported the new ways of working that came with lockdown. This has made a significant difference to our efforts to control the virus and has had a great impact on the safety of everyone that uses or works in our services.
- Our customers have been a driving force in retaining a sense of community in our services, despite the constraints.
- Our customers have supported our work and each other by volunteering and offering telephone buddying.

Case study: the power
of people and community

**One of our customers,
Nicole, recently featured in
the local paper after offering
to gather and deliver essential
food supplies to vulnerable
residents. We were happy
to offer funding to support
Nicole.**

**You can read the article
in full [here](#).**

COME
HOME

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