

# **Sway Welfare Aid Group**

## ***50 YEARS OF LOCAL PEOPLE HELPING LOCAL PEOPLE***

### **Year End Update & Postponement of AGM**

It is with great regret that, in view of the ongoing Covid-19 crisis and the restrictions now in place regarding social gatherings, your Trustees have reluctantly decided that we have no alternative but to postpone our AGM scheduled to take place in November. Unfortunately this also means that the planned celebrations to recognise our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year have also had to be abandoned. We hope to be able to reschedule our AGM during the spring of next year but clearly this will be dependent on the situation at the time.

Unfortunately this has been exceptional year for all of us and our services continue to be affected, with the ever-changing government rules and restrictions that remain in place to protect the most vulnerable members of the community. This has significantly impacted the number of volunteers that work on behalf of SWAG, many of whom either due to the age or underlying medical conditions, continue to self-isolate. Our priority is to protect both our volunteers and clients and our good wishes go to all of them during this exceptional crisis.

A full report on our activities will be provided as part of our deferred AGM but meanwhile the following is a brief update on what we have been able to undertake during the last 12 months:

#### **Lunch Club**

Lunch club was suspended after their March lunch in accordance with the regulations at that time banning group gatherings. Regrettably current guidance does not permit us to restart offering our much-loved lunch club meetings and we anticipate this will remain the case at least until the spring of next year. Our exceptional Coordinators have remained in regular contact with our members during this difficult time, if only to provide that much needed telephone voice during these periods of social isolation. We have also been able deliver some home baked treats on a regular basis over the last few months. We are now planning to deliver two individual home cooked hot meals in both October & November in addition to a Christmas food hamper in December.

#### **Medical Transport**

We continued to provide medical transport on a restricted basis during the year other than during the total lockdown period. After lockdown the service has now returned to a reduced level of normal activity as hospitals have started to open up appointments. Please we would ask that you do not use us for routine trips for dental, opticians or other such non-essential appointments as our driver numbers are significantly reduced with many of our volunteers

continuing to self-isolate in accordance with NHS guidance in respect of age or medical criteria. Our volunteers are no longer permitted to enter hospitals to escort clients who have mobility issues – we can only provide a door to door service. In these cases the client will need to be accompanied by either a close family member or carer. We are also requiring that clients, in addition to our drivers, wear disposable face masks that we will provide, at all times during the journey. Should you require medical transport please continue to call us on 01590 681 500 and select option 1.

### **Prescription Collection**

We introduced in April a prescription collection service for those Sway residents who were unable to visit the local pharmacy due to self-isolation or mobility issues. Unfortunately we are not permitted to deliver controlled medications. This service is being continued but we cannot guarantee that we will be able to always collect medication in a timely fashion and can only promise our best endeavours on a case by case basis. Should you need collection of prescription items please continue to call us on 01590 681 500 option 1.

### **Emergency Grants**

In the exceptional circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, we were able to ring fence an emergency grant reserve to enabling us to help those individuals, families and organisations within Sway who were in severe financial difficulty due to this emergency. This initiative was significantly helped by an extremely generous donation from a local businessman. Our primary focus was to help those people, many of whom may be self-employed or lost their jobs, who are unable to qualify for income support guarantees or enhanced benefit payments that were introduced by the government. We were also able to help, thanks to the donation we received, a number of local organisations in their efforts to produce and provide essential PPE products and other equipment to Lymington and other nearby Hospitals including Oakhaven Hospice. We anticipate that with the government furlough scheme coming to an end and the inevitable increase in unemployment we will see further demand for emergency help during the coming months. You must live in Sway and not be eligible for other forms of emergency income support to qualify. If you are currently suffering a severe financial crisis and feel that you may qualify please visit our website [www.swaghants.org.uk/covid.html](http://www.swaghants.org.uk/covid.html) or call us on 01590 681 500 and select option 2. We will then send you a confidential application form by email to enable your request to be considered.

### **Hardship Grants**

We continued during the year to offer our usual Hardship grants for those individuals and families who encounter an unexpected financial crisis not necessarily related to the Covid-19 Emergency. This included a significant grant to our local school to help with both school uniforms and remote educational learning equipment for children from vulnerable families.

In addition to our financial grants we continue to be the local village agents for the Lymington Food Bank and can arrange emergency food and other household essential deliveries.

Should you feel that you need and believe that you may be eligible for a SWAG Financial Hardship grant or require a food parcel please contact us either by email at [info@swaghants.org.uk](mailto:info@swaghants.org.uk) or call us on 01590 681 500 and select Option 2 to speak with one of our Duty Trustees.

### **Heating Grants**

We continue to pay twice yearly heating grants at Christmas & Easter to our eligible clients in the village. Currently 11 families or individuals receive these grants. If you are struggling to pay for electricity and/or gas, particularly during the colder winter months, and think that you might be eligible please contact us and speak with our Duty Trustee.

### **Future Outlook**

Clearly we remain in uncharted territory not experienced by most of us in our lifetimes. Trying to predict the future is always difficult, more so than ever now, but the likelihood is that the Covid-19 pandemic will continue to impact all of our lives, medically, financially and/or emotionally for many months to come. We anticipate an increased demand for help during this difficult time as this crisis takes a toll on the economy and employment. Fortunately we have managed over the years to establish, thanks to donations from so many people, a healthy balance sheet and invested reserves to continue to support our local community in Sway during these exceptional times. Whilst financial reserves together with donations help us pay for the work that we do, none of this would be possible without the loyalty, unstinting support and sheer hard work from our many volunteers.