

It happened to all of us. Everyone has been affected by lockdown and the global effort to control the pandemic.

Individuals, family and communities now have an altered life which has left us all with the realisation that things have changed for the foreseeable future and we need to adapt and re-focus while taking steps towards any form of a “new normal,” whatever that may be.

At **People Matter**, this is the most challenging time we have faced in our history of supporting job seekers for over two decades. By way of comparison, in 2019 we helped 845 new clients. Since the beginning of the pandemic from March - September, that number had already exceeded a thousand.

We are aware of what the past months have meant to everyone - principally to our clients who are at the heart of all we do. We strive tirelessly to help, especially the most vulnerable who need and now sorely miss all the personal contact and support we normally provide. However, we are bridging gaps and reaching out wherever and however we can.

This newsletter is to update everyone who knows us, uses our services and is interested in how we are going forward and wishes us well. We need and appreciate your goodwill and support.

These are challenging and uncertain times but our mantra is consistent. We will provide a safe and effective environment for all our clients and contacts as well as ourselves.

**People Matter** core values remain in place. We will keep responding, adapting and evolving to fulfil our commitment to encouraging and enabling people into work. In the current climate, this is an essential endeavour. Here is the story so far and our hopes beyond.



*Ann*

UPDATE FROM  
ANN GILLARD, CEO

COVID-19  
RESPONSE SPECIAL

## Our Initial Response

We closed on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, ahead of the official lockdown so that we could put systems in place for the team to work from home and ensure continuity of our services.

Clients with appointments were contacted in advance to advise everyone how we would now operate. This was difficult as we knew we would be severing important links with some vulnerable people.

The recognition of the profound effect this would have on clients fuelled our determination to respond as promptly as we could. Some 84 appointments had to be cancelled, yet contact was made swiftly to establish remote appointments and give advice.



## Team Work

Our response was immediate and effective.

A whole new system of remote home working with Zoom meetings/IT upgrades and paperwork logistics were in place in a short space of time. This has relied on planning and cooperation as a concerted effort.

We have adapted our ways of working with the shared goal of helping and connecting with clients. Furloughed staff were in the loop and, as ever, we kept in touch with each other individually and as a team.

At present our office is open to a limited team of core workers with all the necessary Covid-19 Safe measures in place.

## Better Together - Linking With Other Organisations

As we all know, redundancies are now sadly commonplace and the number of new claimants of benefits is rising rapidly. The local Job Centre Plus had closed its doors in compliance with social distancing rules, yet has been working remotely. However, vulnerable clients can be seen in person. As Universal Credit claimants have surged in numbers, there has been recognition that assistance is needed to get job seekers "work ready". Referrals are coming and are likely to increase.

We have noticed that the demographic has changed as more professional, qualified individuals claiming UC have contacted us for help. The message from Department of Work and Pensions is to use "downtime" to "upskill". People will fall through the gaps, particularly the most vulnerable in society who don't have access to IT or are unused to it.

Key areas hit by job losses are aviation, arts, theatre and hospitality. Our experienced teams will help clients identify their transferable skills. If someone has held a responsible job in one sphere, he/she can use their experience in another. Of course, it takes confidence to change but we can offer practical advice and encouragement. **People Matter** now has a private You Tube channel whereby clients can access specific courses run by experienced trainers.

We know that more Work Coaches at the Job Centre are being recruited across Sussex to support the demand and we will readily augment their efforts.

As ever, we are in regular touch with our local Foodbank who faced a huge increase in demand for their help at the start of lockdown. Similarly, we link with charities 3VA and Southdown in areas of mental health and wellbeing. These alliances are well established and much valued. As we all know, in difficult times it is always helpful to have friends and contacts close by. Long may this continue.

### Useful Links



## Money Matters

Finance is pivotal at present, and we are pleased to have received a grant from The Community Crisis Fund via National Lottery to increase our capacity to help clients.

This will go some way to assisting Advisers and provide extra training for them specifically in mental health and wellbeing as this is a key area currently.

This funding is for a limited period. If you are someone who uses Amazon or Ebay, please consider supporting us. Both businesses operate a scheme where they financially support charities, nominated by individuals when purchases are made at no cost to the buyer.

## Working for You

The pandemic has obviously meant new ways of operating for the Working For You team and we have worked hard to support our Advisers in preparing clients for the limited job opportunities becoming available. Just a few days before the late March lockdown, we had presented seven clients for jobs at a local hotel – only for all to be withdrawn as the hospitality sector abruptly shut down. Widespread redundancies across the sector sadly meant a surplus of jobseekers for the few hotel roles available.

Some of the largest still remain closed and there were big numbers of redundancies when Shearings coach holidays collapsed and the Majestic and Burlington closed (now under new ownership but still shut). We stepped in and offered support to those who lost their jobs. We worked hard in early summer to support initiatives to help with the harvesting of crops. Hopefully – as you read this – a good number of our clients are harvesting apples in Sussex and Kent.

Where jobs have become available to us, we have successfully introduced online Zoom sessions to sift and select candidates. Putting a face to the client has compensated a little for the loss of personal contact. Group Zoom sessions to allow employers to meet clients are also proving successful.

The scarcity of jobs means we are having to move ever more quickly to get our clients in front of employers. Yet we have some very good people looking for help – a reflection of the mayhem caused by Covid 19.

## Looking Forward

We are well aware of the need and the challenges ahead. We have yet to start providing any outreach services and, in fact, only saw our first 2 clients at Saffrons Road 'face to face' very recently. Like everyone else we are taking a very cautious and measured approach to finding ways of working which minimise risk to the team and clients. This week we are due to see a couple more and the hope is to build on that in coming weeks whilst continuing to support the majority by phone and email. If that is successful, and depending on the level of risk at that point, we can begin to look at outreach again.

I hope that by the time you read our next newsletter, we will be reporting progress and success in many of our endeavours.

Thank you for your support, it means so much.



If you would like to comment or add to anything you have heard here, please do get in touch via:

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