

Possability People

Ensuring disabled people can
live independently, with dignity
and without prejudice

A photograph of two people walking away from the camera on a dirt path that runs along the top of a grassy cliff. The person on the left is wearing a white t-shirt and dark trousers, while the person on the right is wearing a light-colored t-shirt, shorts, and a backpack. In the background, the blue sea meets the white cliffs under a clear blue sky.

Our
review of
2020/2021

Our Vision: A society where anything is possible regardless of ability

Our Mission: Ensuring disabled people can live independently, with dignity and without prejudice

We have supported 6,743 people this year

Foreword by Maddy Hamp, Chair of the Trustee Board



“Possability People is a unique organisation, filled with courage and creativity...”

It's difficult to know where to start. None of us have lived through a global pandemic or had to deal with such extraordinary circumstances that the year gave us.

Each and every one of us has been affected by Covid-19; no-one has been spared. And while we are now hopeful that life will return to some sort of normality, we are keenly aware that the disease will have left deep scars for many of our friends, beneficiaries, volunteers, and staff.

I am incredibly impressed by, and proud of, the way in which Possability People's staff and volunteer team have found their way through such difficult times.

The teams acted swiftly to move services and projects online wherever possible. They created new projects which held out a virtual hand to anyone who needed it. They didn't baulk in providing face to face support for those clients who needed it. They found ingenious solutions to keep people connected and supported, many of which worked so well that they will continue.

And of course, support for people who will be affected by the ongoing effects of the virus, be that health, wellbeing, or financial will continue to be provided by all our teams.

Possability People is a unique organisation, filled with courage and creativity and a commitment to supporting disabled people and people with long term health conditions.

The fact that many of the staff and volunteers were themselves shielding didn't deter them from providing a compassionate and high quality service during a time of extreme stress.

The organisation has supported 6,743 people over the year, which I think you'll agree is a tremendous achievement.

On behalf of the board, the most sincere thank you to the staff, volunteers and our supporters. I hope you will see just how much they have all achieved.

Our full annual report is available on our website, Charity Commission website and from Companies House.

Charity number 1114435
Company number 05706441

Cover photo courtesy of ryan-kwok-tNffWlNwJ3E from Unsplash

An exceptional year; Covid-19 and beyond.

This year has taken an unprecedented toll on disabled people. Their vulnerability to the virus and the impact of the measures put in place to control its spread have presented many new and evolving challenges.

The Office for National Statistics¹ reported that disabled people were more likely to be worried or very worried about the virus and the effect it had on their lives, feel stressed, anxious, bored or frustrated about the virus, feel a deterioration of their mental health, be worried they are a burden on other people and feel more lonely than non-disabled people.

This national picture is borne out locally. A large proportion of the disabled people we support in Sussex and Surrey found themselves on the shielding list. Many others with underlying health conditions shielded voluntarily to protect themselves.

At the start of the pandemic, access to simple basics such as food, medication, healthcare, digital support and registering for centralised support was challenging.

As the year unfolded, new barriers presented themselves. Emergency changes to travel infrastructure made disabled (we call it 'accessible') parking and access to accessible facilities more challenging. Changing layouts of supermarket car parks to enable socially distanced queues often meant accessible parking spaces near entrances and exits to the store were cordoned off. Queuing and mask wearing also proved problematic for people with sensory impairments and guide dog owners.

While a great deal of information was released by national and local agencies on a regular basis, rarely was this targeted at specific audiences or in accessible formats. People contacted us frequently because they didn't know what information was pertinent because there was so much of it. As personal protection equipment (PPE) became more widely available and the vaccine programme started rolling out, tailored information about access, eligibility and support for these became vital.

The year tested Possability People just as it has tested our community.

By the beginning of April, we had moved 35 office based staff to home working, set up over 40 Zoom accounts and trained staff and volunteers to use it, provided 13 additional mobile phones and 5 laptops to volunteers for remote working. We completed 38 new assessments to workstations to ensure all staff and volunteers could safely and effectively work from home and provided additional equipment such as monitor raisers, peripheral keyboards etc. as appropriate. Eighteen volunteers continued their roles remotely, while a further 42 roles were put on hold. For those not actively volunteering, their teams provided regular catch ups to ensure their wellbeing and continued engagement until they could resume their role. Each staff team has developed detailed plans for remote communication and maintaining positive working relationships in the absence of face to face contact in the office and the camaraderie that usually fosters.

We developed a micro-site within our website to collate and share information on Covid-19, not just on the official national guidance but on a variety of subjects to help and support people in lots of ways. From food and shopping, to transport, health and wellbeing, exercise and cultural activities, to home schooling and more, the microsite had 2,368 visits in its first three months. It hosted a regular, initially weekly service update which reiterated the national guidance.

We provided printed and posted material from all our projects and services for people without digital access and invested in the Freephone bolt-on for our Zoom account so people who could only access the service via phone were not expected to pay for the privilege.

We have worked across Brighton, Hove and Sussex to ensure the needs of disabled people are not overlooked by Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC), East Sussex County Council (ESCC) or Sussex Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) We also worked with Brighton and Hove City Council to improve the future implementation of Active Travel arrangements.

The money received from our funders feels more important than ever this year, and we are grateful to all of them.

¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/coronavirusandthesocial-impactsondisabledpeopleingreatbritain/february2021>

In numbers and stories

Advice Centre

Advising in a pandemic is challenging. With many of the team, and service users shielding, coming into the Advice Centre was not an option.

Everything was switched to phone, zoom and emails almost overnight.

Three volunteers supported the team remotely. The team kept in touch with all their volunteers during the year.

The Advice Centre dealt with 4,545 enquiries during the year, around 3,000 by phone. We have about two referrals a week through the Money Works partnership, while referrals through our MS (Multiple Sclerosis) project vary monthly.

We also offered support for medical assessments, thanks to the Henry Smith Grant.

We coordinated and led a response to the Sussex & Kent Tribunal Users Group, ensuring the voice of disabled people is heard effectively within the tribunal process.

Peer support 'buddies' supported clients remotely: 16 clients on the pre-tribunal process and 9 with advice and preparation for medical assessments.

Of the 89 cases we know the outcome of, there were 41 successful benefit applications, 27 successful appeals and eight successful tribunals. Only 13 were unsuccessful. We can only report on beneficiaries who have provided this data.

For the 76 people who reported an increase in income as a result of our support, this amounts to £481,959 per annum (£9,268 per week).

We rely upon clients reporting this information to us. However, it is worth noting that the DWP still has a considerable backlog, meaning we may not know the outcome until many months after we supported someone.

Advice Centre Story

L has uncontrolled seizures throughout the day, lasting anywhere from a few seconds to a few minutes. He is a young man living with his parents. During a seizure, L will become very disorientated and may lose bladder control. He can't travel unaccompanied outside of the house, prepare or cook food, or even bathe without supervision.

Not only is this a physically stressful situation, it also harms L's mental wellbeing. He relies upon his family for encouragement and support to take medication and manage day-to-day tasks such as washing, dressing, and eating.

L's mum made an application for Personal Independence Payment, and submitted medical evidence dating back to childhood. This included reports stating the uncontrollable nature of the seizures, the very low likelihood of the condition changing, and evidence to support the impact on his mental health.

L was required to attend a medical assessment. An award was made of 8 points for mobility and 0 points for daily living. L's mother contacted us at this point to support her to challenge the decision.

We produced the official documents for appeal, and gathered supporting information describing the grounds on which it was being made.

We also contacted L's GP for further medical evidence. Once L and his mother agreed with the case we had produced, we submitted it to the Tribunals Service.

Within two weeks, the DWP contacted L. He was awarded 17 points for daily living and further points for mobility.

L now receives the enhanced PIP rate for his daily living and mobility needs and it has been awarded for five years.



4,545 enquiries
during the year, around 3,000 by phone.

16 clients had remote 'peer buddies' pre-tribunal
9 had advice and preparation for medical assessments.

41 successful benefit applications, 27 successful appeals and
eight successful tribunals.

100% of survey respondents are:
*more confident to deal with their benefits situation;
*happy with the information we gave them;
*satisfied we met their access requirements;
*feeling understood and supported by the team.

Shopmobility

Our traditional Shopmobility Service was unable to run for most of the year, closing in line with "non-essential retail" at the start of lockdown. As restrictions eased during the summer months, the service was able to open again and switched to a completely contactless service, with new cleaning and collection regimes.

One volunteer single-handedly kept the service going even when we could not offer hires. They attended the site weekly to clean and charge the scooters and prevent deterioration. During lockdown, we were able to offer some hires, particularly to people whose own equipment had broken down and we encouraged people to contact us if throughout the year if they needed a scooter in case we could safely support them

59 hires

44 customers

One very dedicated
volunteer

Community Employment Service

Despite the challenges of Covid-19 on the job market, The Community Employment Service supported 49 people to get work, 31 people to volunteer and 18 people to start further education

The team also connected people to other sources of support for crisis prevention, provided workshops, tools and one to one support to navigate people's challenges and ultimately support them to move towards work.

Get Set (Surrey)

We completed the successful delivery of the Get Set programme in Surrey. A grant from the Surrey Community Foundation enabled us to continue working with beneficiaries until December. As a result, 40 people were supported through the project.

Get Set Opening Doors

Get Set Opening Doors (funded through the National Lottery) continued throughout the year in Hastings and Brighton & Hove. 183 people were supported across the two sites, and we offered the full range of Get Set support. Long term, personalised and holistic support enabled people to build skills in managing their health, employability skills, communication and confidence.

Get Set Get Connected

Our new youth project was delivered in Bexhill, Hastings & Eastbourne. The project works with young people with a health condition or impairment, primarily mental health and neurodiversity, aged 18-24. Funded through the DWP, it launched in all three Job Centre Plus (JCP) sites in October and is already delivering significant outcomes for its beneficiaries.

Building on the success of Get Set, it adds an opportunity for participants to design and deliver a community project of their choosing.

It overcomes the health barriers faced by young people who also have no sense of belonging. In addition, it aims to reconnect them with their communities, so they feel less alienated.

Get Set Opening Doors story

K was referred to us by Southdown Supported Employment Team who had provided as much support as they could. When we met, we learnt about K's situation, his health and the severe mental health impairments he'd experienced (now well medicated). All this had left a lasting impact on his self confidence and self-esteem, as well as some anxiety.

K also told us of a mild learning disability requiring support with forms, paperwork, communication and comprehension.

He felt hopeless and wanted to give up work searching. He also had some misconceptions about the way he was perceived and possibly discriminated against by employers.

As we got to know him, it became clear his expectations needed to be managed. Difficult conversations were carefully handled to encourage him to see how others might view him. He was open to this and found our tools and resources helpful. We worked on building confidence, self-esteem communication skills and interviews preparation. He joined our employability skills course and wrote a strong CV, as well as prepared for job applications. He began to understand why his applications hadn't worked in the past.

The work K was interested in was not available during this time but we kept him motivated and positive and he worked hard to be ready to go once things opened up again.

K successfully applied for a cleaning job at a college. After the interview, K called us to say thank you because the interview prep we had done was "spot on". He was offered the job the next morning, and because he was confident in disclosing his health impairment during the interview, his new employer supported from the start.

K started work with a Wellness Action Plan able to start work with all the right support in place, leaving him well placed to sustain. His employer also received a Wellness Action Plan template for other employees.

175 workshops delivered
58 courses run
318 people supported
12,675 contact sessions



"I had been a Get Set client for 8 months when I found work, after 3 years of being on other services, waiting and no hope. They helped me to make a great CV and cover letter, which I'd never had, and interview skills. When I was low, they picked me up not only with their kindness and understanding, but also the tips on staying well and healthy which they sent through the post (extremely helpful). I almost gave up looking but they would not let me and now I work part time, ten hours a week. Fantastic. My message to people who are serious about finding work?

Go to Possability People's Get Set Opening Doors and you can achieve what I have....

Possability People are absolutely fantastic".

Photo courtesy of gill-ribeiro-3h08igCybds from Unsplash

Payroll and Supported Bank Accounts

Our Payroll and Supported Bank Account (SBA) service alleviates the administrative burden of managing the responsibilities of managing staff when receiving a Direct Payment. This service is relied upon by many disabled people. This year, the team supported a total of 733 people.

The Payroll & SBA team have had a particularly challenging year as a result of the pandemic.

The staff team moved to home working, with one volunteer set up to work from home.

Additionally, the team found themselves at the frontline of a deluge of enquiries from disabled people trying to understand new Covid-19 rules.

773
people have benefited from using our Payroll and Supported Bank Account service.

Without a consistent source of accessible, reliable information for disabled people, our Payroll and SBA customers turned to us. Each time guidance changed, or the government or NHS rolled out new information, we received enquiries from confused and uncertain disabled people not knowing where to turn.

For example, at the start of the pandemic, disabled people needed to know if it was safe for their PAs to come into their home to provide care. It was unclear if they were expected to provide PPE for their PAs or how they should pay for it.

Many needed support to provide their PAs with letters justifying their role as key workers, or support to access PPE and vaccines. The team worked tirelessly to source and share appropriate information throughout the year and put many minds to rest when all other information sources could not respond.

The Get Involved Group (GIG)

The Get Involved Group (GIG) is our user involvement group. It provides a platform for people with a lived experience of being disabled to have their voice heard on things that directly affect them.

At the start of the pandemic, we checked our members had support for their day to day needs, and offered ongoing phone support for people most at risk of isolation, making weekly or fortnightly calls to disabled people across the city.

Our monthly newsletter was a source of accessible information for disabled people. Not everyone was online so we posted hard copies too.

We ran regular social events via Zoom. It didn't replace face-to-face engagement but was a safe alternative, and allowed disabled people to come together and talk about issues they were facing. It also meant professionals could share information or seek views and led to the establishment of a focus group of disabled people, Public Health staff and Brighton & Hove City Council staff, giving disabled people the chance to hear from question to them.

Emergency Covid-19 funding enabled us to offer support to isolated disabled people in West Sussex. Safe At Home offered a range of support, including regular or ad-hoc calls, signposting and referral support to other services, regular newsletters, social media groups and online socials.

It supported 45 people, many with very complex needs, and prevented crisis escalation for several members, especially those with deteriorating mental health. The project provided 400 contact calls, usually lasting around an hour, and engaged with people via email or post.

Towards the end of the year, the GIG began to focus on partnership work, developing relationships with Brighton & Hove City Council's transport and parking departments. Queries from disabled people are now investigated and resolved more quickly because of increased trust between partners.

The Disabled Car User Advisory Group is a new partnership with the council's parking department, allowing blue badge holders and other disabled people regular opportunities for discussion and recommendations to be made about parking in the city. Disabled people are now consulted at the design stage of developments rather than fighting against something already completed. For example, tranche 2 of the Active Travel bid involved disabled people far earlier.

We conducted a full accessibility audit of the Phase 3 plans for the Valley Gardens Development where key findings included identification of danger or obstructions for immediate remedy, some temporary mitigations for work in progress and suggestions or improvements for the final scheme.



The GIG had to stop face-to-face groups and move online

400 telephone calls to isolated people

45 people with complex needs supported

12 newsletters

Lots of Zooms

...this service has been "invaluable in getting me through this time, I'm really grateful."

Photo courtesy of christina-wocintechchat-com-J7EDyqUwXJI at Unsplash

Link Back

Link Back works with community health and voluntary sector services to support vulnerable people leaving hospital and reduced the likelihood of them being readmitted. It combines access to hospital discharge funding so vulnerable patients can be safely discharged from hospital, with ongoing, person centred support (through link work), so patients become more independent and can recover.

The impact of Covid-19 on people needing to shield has been enormous, often left without trusted support services and networks.. The needed for hospitals to free up beds to cope with increased demand saw patients discharged home much earlier than usual, without support in place for their ongoing recovery.

Our home assessments stopped and were done by phone, making it harder to get a true picture of someone's circumstances and plan support. More time was spent working with social workers, therapists, and care agencies to gain additional information.

Our Early Response Service coordinates Brighton & Hove City Council's Hospital Discharge Grant. Having a suitable home is essential for good health and wellbeing; when people are unable to leave home this is more important. Where many beneficiaries were shielding at home, their poor housing conditions became more apparent.

We made appropriate information available, including a leaflet translated into 20 common languages to explain the services for non-English speakers.

The Early Response Service supported more younger disabled people with complex health and support needs so they could return home from hospital safely.

288 hospital bed days saved for the NHS with an indicative financial saving of £115,200

200 calls to former clients

440 referrals into the service

144 people supported through Hospital Discharge Funding

309 people supported into community based services for ongoing recovery, health and wellbeing. 150 supported referrals and 253 signposting recommendations made

We made supported referrals so people could access a range of services, including home help and PA support, befriending or ongoing one to one support, and disability or benefits advice.

We referred to Adult Social Care and Access Point, emergency shopping, medical, GP or pharmacy, Hospital Discharge funding, housing support and mobility technical equipment. We developed new partnerships with HealthWatch, Hospital Discharge Service (HOPS), Sussex Interpreting Service, BHCC housing adaptations, the social prescribing network, the Falls Prevention Steering Group and the Early Intervention Steering Group.

Early Response Story

K was referred to the Early Response Service when his family raised concerns his home didn't have a functional kitchen, toilet or bathroom. They were also worried about the electrics, plumbing, a possible rat infestation and clutter.

We contacted K and got his consent to go and have a look at his home. We took an electrician with us who was worried about the wiring, damp and out of date equipment.

A Hospital Discharge Grant funded clearance work, a deep clean, declutter, and extensive rubbish removal. A condemned washing machine and cooker were removed, along with the bed frame, mattress and furniture which was unusable. The kitchen and bathroom sinks were repaired, and floorboards replaced in the bathroom. A new immersion heater was installed.

A referral to the Mears Home Improvement Agency Handyperson Grant was made for a full rewire. A new double mattress was also purchased.

K is slowly regaining his confidence, and with support from family, re-learning how to manage household chores. Work pressures and money worries, exacerbated by Covid-19, brought things to a head. Then he had a stroke leading to his admission to hospital.

K isn't embarrassed about his home now and motivated to find support for other areas of his life, so he can improve his work life balance and focus on being well.

MSK Social Prescribing

We provide social prescribing to support clinicians at Sussex MSK partnership. We signpost MSK patients to services who can support them to change their behaviour and improve their health.

The pandemic meant a reduced service was offered until July 2020, when the team was provided with remote access and the full clinical support service resumed.

The majority of referrals to the service were for people wanting to become more active, but it also saw a significant rise in the number of people presenting with mental health concerns, either worsened or resulting from the ongoing pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures. The team therefore took mental health training to refresh their skills and knowledge.

Providing remote phone service support worked well. It reduced our beneficiaries needs to travel and enabled them to talk about sensitive subjects in the privacy of their own home.

Many commented on the convenience of telephone contact; many on the financial and physical challenges of getting to a clinic, particularly in rural areas.

MSK Social Prescribing Story

S had been dealing with a stressful period at work, describing it as horrendous. She had been working nine-hour days hunched over a computer, exacerbating the restricted mobility and neck pain. She had been planning to change career, wanting to work with horses but was feeling stuck, unmotivated and finding it hard to focus on the online module she was studying.

We explored different approaches to learning to help her re-engage with the course.

She agreed to practice her daily exercises and find a more appealing course module.

When we followed up with S, she was still working on exercises to improve her mobility and range of movement, which was getting better.

She was already two thirds of the way through a new study module and more motivated.

Steady and Strong

Weekly
Zoom

Originally called Steady On and run as an in-person strength and balance class before the pandemic, Steady and Strong is now a virtual weekly class, run in 10 sessions.

Currently on its third run, it has 35 participants. A volunteer supports the class, making sure the instructor knows about any technical difficulties and starting conversations at the end.

Many participants needed support using Zoom at the start, so the team provided support for everyone who needed it. The acquisition of new digital skills is an unexpected bonus and several participants have now used Zoom to speak with their friends and family, something they were unlikely to have otherwise done.

35
participants

Moving the class online also removes geographic limitations. And people who experience social anxiety about in-person groups can join with their camera off, something lots of participants from across Sussex have welcomed.

The team has created a series of Steady and Strong YouTube films so those who cannot take part in the class can still participate in the exercises. The social prescribing team have made use of these by signposting people to them. The feedback on these videos has been positive. "It felt like I was doing them [the exercises] along with you, you were almost there in my living room with me!"



Possability People: At Home



Possability People: At Home enables disabled people to stay independent and safe at home. It is registered with the Care Quality Commission.

It provides a bespoke service that gets to know its clients' needs, preferences, and aspirations, and designs care packages to meet them. Its skilled staff provide a wide range of support including domestic duties, personal care, medical care, medication management and community support. It operates across Brighton & Hove, East and West Sussex.

At Home can support people with age related impairments, complex mental health, learning disabilities and physical and sensory impairments and can provide 24 hour support for people with very complex care needs.

The team continued to work during the pandemic. Some clients chose to receive their care and support as usual while closely following guidelines around PPE and other safety measures. For others, the team adapted their support with PAs providing doorstep delivery of food, medication and a socially distanced conversation instead of going into the home.

100%
of clients feel listened to
and treated with dignity
and respect

Our beneficiaries say At Home is flexible enough to meet their needs and they are dealt with courteously and professionally. The service gives people the space they need to talk things over safely and confidentially.

This year the service registered with East Sussex County Council's Support with Confidence scheme. We have been approved by East Sussex County Council's Approved List to provide an accommodation based "Supported Living" scheme. This will allow collaboration with partner organisation, Zetetic housing.

100%
of clients agreed their
care was personalised,
met their needs and
improved their quality
of life

At Home Story

P was referred to At Home during the first lockdown. She was very lonely and hadn't left her flat for over two years. There were concerns around her mental health, including depression, anxiety and recovery from alcoholism. In addition, her social worker was concerned P wasn't eating or drinking properly. P was contacting her GP and mental health team almost every day, to tell them how depressed she was.

An At Home team member went to P's home, together with her social worker (after a full Covid-19 risk assessment), to do an assessment. We talked in depth with P about her anxieties, the best ways the team could provide support and how quickly a service could begin.

During the set-up phase, we called P regularly to update her and kept her social worker updated and informed. This helped to ease some of P's concerns.

However, in the first few weeks, P found getting to know the PAs quite challenging. Still, she persevered and was able to call the office for reassurance and support whenever she needed it.

Now that P has a routine with three PAs, she is thriving.

She has a different relationship with each PA, who all support her with various tasks. P now has support with cooking, goes out to the local shops, goes for walks and has pampering sessions at home.

Both P and their social worker have reflected on how positively life has changed in a short time since using the service.

Possability Place

Our accessible venue, Possability Place, is usually used for training, meetings and events.

This year, all the regular groups and people who hire the space to deliver activities have not been operating.

We have reached out to the community to explore Covid-19 secure opportunities to enable people to use this asset, resulting in some hires during October, November, and December.

This allowed two groups to meet socially distanced and safely, enabling services to be delivered to our local community.

We also used the site as a collection and delivery base for our PPE provision to disabled people.



Using a grant from Barclay's Bank, we purchased and distributed PPE to disabled people who use our Payroll and Supported Bank Accounts service. Possability Place provided a safe and accessible point for disabled people to collect from.

PS Don't forget Possability Place is available for hire again. Contact us on 01273 894040 or email rooms@possabilitypeople.org.uk for more info.

Thank you to everyone involved with our organisation. Together, we can keep going above and beyond.

Contact Us

If you would like to find out more about any of our services, we can be contacted by phone, email or textphone.

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www.possabilitypeople.org.uk

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