

Life in Lockdown for Individuals and Community Groups

April 2021

By working with East Grinstead Museum, we have a series of case studies on our website that capture the pandemic experience and issues from the point of view of Businesses, Individuals, and community groups.

About the organisation

“ *The Club is thus part of Lions Clubs International, the largest service club organisation in the world, with more than 1.3 million members, serving their communities in 205 countries.*

Webpage: https://www.eastgrinsteadlions.co.uk/page_4391436.html

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A day in the life of an East Grinstead Lion helping at the town's COVID-19 vaccination center.

East Grinstead Town Council's offices at East Court, *just after 7am on a frosty February morning, and I'm wearing several layers against the cold, topped with my Lions hi-viz tabard.* It's starting to get light: light enough for me to brush the overnight snow away from in front of Meridian Hall, where people will be queuing for their vaccinations during the course of the day.

However, Jenny and James from the Town Council maintenance team are here before me, and *have already cleared the snow and ice.* It's perishing cold, and we joke about the fate of brass monkeys. After a couple of minutes I go inside to be briefed by Rob, one of the managers responsible for the vaccinations. He's also been there for some time supervising the setup: they're preparing lists of patients,

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putting pre-printed details onto record cards to speed the identification and clinical checks, and getting the computer systems connected, all ready to start at 8am sharp.

I find out about today's arrangements: we're using the *Pfizer vaccine*, which is potent but *tricky to store and manage*, and we need to add another screening question to the checks we do with people arriving at the centre.

It looks like we won't be working the following Saturday: although they'll have vaccine available, the clinical staff are already fully deployed at other centres that day, so it's not practical to run Meridian Hall as well. These *clinicians are also volunteering their time*: they're working in the vaccination centres in addition to their normal working week, so Rob and his manager Margaret need to be careful about how hard they work them.

The other Lions and volunteers arrive, and we start to put up the gazebo to protect patients from the elements as they queue outside the hall. One of its brackets has come loose from the daily put-up and take-down: I must remember to bring a replacement nut to secure it later. As we're putting up the gazebo, patients start arriving, so we pause to ask them to wait until the hall opens: one of the key things we've been asked to do is to keep numbers in the hall down. As one of the doctors said *This is a great place to get a COVID vaccine; it will also be a great place to catch COVID, if we get too many people in the hall* - a sobering thought.

Some of the early birds decide to wait in their cars to keep warm: others prefer to stand as close as they can get while we work. People are unsurprisingly very keen to get their vaccine after all this time, and after all they've heard about the virus. They won't have to wait long once the hall opens: but some really don't want to lose even a minute. We feel bad having to ask people to wait, or even to come back later if they're ridiculously early: but we need to protect everyone in the hall - especially the clinicians - by making sure patients don't pack the place out by arriving too early.

The gazebo is up (with the injured bracket temporarily gaffer-taped together), I've briefed the Lions volunteers, we've been given the nod by Rob, and we start on our spiel.

We check the patients are not too early, ask some clinical screening questions, and caution them to cleanse their hands and keep strictly 2m apart in the hall. People are suspicious of the screening questions: they don't want to be turned away; but giving the 'wrong' answer only means we get a clinician to discuss with them before deciding what to do. It's quite a long spiel, and some people start to edge forward anxiously even before we've finished.

I hope the queue won't grow too long today: we might see more snow, and it's not great to have people queueing beyond the end of the gazebo. Now and again we see someone who's obviously struggling with mobility, or sometimes they ask us for help. We have several wheelchairs available, provided by [East Grinstead Disability](#)

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Access, <http://www.egaccess.co.uk/> and we can use these to help those in need get into the hall. We mustn't forget to cleanse the chairs afterwards though - safety first.

After three hours outside Meridian Hall it's time for the next shift to take over, and we can go home to warm up. We're working for 12 hours today: four shifts of three hours each, two volunteers in each shift. We can *cover up to 7 days a week, 12 hours a day*: this gives the vaccination team maximum flexibility - whatever days they decide they need to work, we can support them. We hand over to the next shift, and I thank the volunteer who's been working with me: he's not a Lion, but one of a number of people who've asked us if they can help out: we're trying hard to find slots in the rota to give all the new helpers a chance to contribute.

I'm back later in the day, just before 8pm to help with the gazebo take-down. It's getting colder, and the last few patients are still coming; so we wait until we're fairly sure that they've all arrived, and start the well-practised job of putting the gazebo away. However - *the weights we use to hold the legs firmly on the ground are frozen in place*. We wonder whether we're going to have to pour boiling water on them; but a couple of good thumps and they come free. I've remembered the nut and fix the broken bracket: the gazebo lives to fight another day. Everything's all packed away into the hall, and we exchange with the vaccination team a couple of minutes' worth of the inconsequential banter that all late workers exchange. They'll be here for a while yet, clearing up, making sure any no-shows are noted to be followed up later, and preparing for tomorrow.

The NHS team in East Grinstead have vaccinated 600 people today: that's 600 people protected from the virus, and 600 people who are less likely to unknowingly infect others. They'll do another 600 tomorrow, and will keep going day after day and week after week, at this centre and many others like it, until the job is done. I'm pleased that in a small way we've been able to help them, both in giving practical support, and almost as importantly in giving moral support: they're not doing this on their own, but ordinary members of the community are stepping forward to stand with them. Anyway: this is the sort of thing Lions Clubs exist for, so we're not doing anything special here: it's just what we do.

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East Grinstead Museum is to document life in lockdown, in our town. We are keen to capture diverse experiences - sad or joyful - and to reflect East Grinstead's diversity. Contributions are welcomed from people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities.

Using these collected items, the museum plans to create an exhibition documenting how COVID-19 impacted life in East Grinstead and the surrounding villages.

To learn more about this exhibition call 01342 302233.

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We have a simple ambition, at Healthwatch West Sussex... to make local health and social care services better for people that use them. We are here to listen, take action and influence positive change for local people living in West Sussex.

We record what people tell us and share this anonymously with those who make decisions about our health and care services.

You can contact us in several ways:

-  **Telephone** 0300 012 0122
-  **Email** helpdesk@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk
-  **Website** www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

You can also follow our social media channels to always be updated with the latest in health and social care news across West Sussex: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#).

If you have questions about the content of this update, please either call 0300 012 0122 or email cheryl.berry@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

