

reNOVAte

Introduction

Lewes Volunteer Bureau began receiving offers of volunteer help immediately after the flood. A list of volunteers was collected including people who had contacted Lewes District Council direct, people who contacted the Bureau, and volunteers from the Bureau's Help Service. A total of 89 volunteers were listed and 55 of these were actively involved between October 2000 and March 2001.

The Lewes Flood After-care Group was set up in a matter of days after the flood with members of the voluntary, community and statutory sectors. Lewes District & Wealden Mind were instrumental in establishing the group, providing staff support and a room for meetings. The Group held daily meetings in the first week with the frequency becoming less through November and up to Christmas. The Chair and Vice-chair of the group attended the Lewes Recovery Group, the central co-ordinating body with representatives from the emergency services, Environment Agency, statutory, business and voluntary sectors.

The tasks carried out by volunteers included cleaning homes, distributing information leaflets, helping to clear premises, acting as Lewes Flood Appeal assessors, and helping to complete flood application forms. We put together task groups to clean seven homes. Four of the Help Service volunteers assisted with a range of driving requests from people affected by the flood. Between 16th October 2000 and the 3rd December 2000 more than 212 volunteer hours were used on these activities.

Money was granted by the Ouse Valley Primary Care Group for a short-term post to focus on flood-related activities. It was evident that many people would not be home by Christmas and a party was planned for Friday 29th December to enable people separated from friends and neighbours to meet up in a social setting and to share thoughts and feelings about the flood.

More than 50 guests attended the party. 24 volunteers provided 130 hours of help – before, during and afterwards - in making the party such a success. Donations of food, money and gifts provided by all sectors of the community ensured that all the costs were covered. The Mayor of Lewes, the President of the Rotary Club of Lewes and the Chairman of Lewes District Council attended in their official capacities and spent a lot of time talking with individuals.

During the following January and February, the Flood Relief Support Worker helped set up the Renovate Project by making contact with local organisations and businesses, the media and individuals to recruit volunteer supervisors for the volunteer teams who would carry out the decorating and gardening tasks. At the same time, there was a short-term worker at Lewes District & Wealden Mind approaching local businesses to promote the recruitment of employee volunteer teams to help on the project.

On 30th March 2001 the Renovate Project began.

Rosey Eggar, Lewes Volunteer Bureau

Renovate Project Report

Setting up the Project

In Lewes on 12 October 2000, around 630 houses and over 200 businesses were affected by severe flooding which devastated local communities. Following this disaster, a number of emergency procedures were put into operation. However the scale of the flooding was such that recovery was going to take many months to complete.

Of immediate concern was the effect that the flooding would have on people's lives and the necessity for providing emotional, social and practical support for them. Within days the Lewes Flood Aftercare group had been set up by various statutory and voluntary sector organisations in the area. It was based at Lewes District and Wealden Mind in Western Road, Lewes and details of this group's work can be found in their final report, dated March 2001.

By the end of 2000, the emergency response for emotional support had lessened while a continuing need for more practical help over a longer period of time had been identified. Practical help, such as decorating, was going to be useful as people returned to their homes and help with restoring gardens would be particularly valuable as this was not usually covered by insurance. In January, the Renovate project was initiated by the Flood Aftercare group with the help of Lewes Volunteer Bureau, Lewes District Council, South Downs Council for Voluntary Service (SDCVS), representatives of the business sector, and Lewes District and Wealden Mind. The Aftercare group finished its work on 30 March 2001 and was replaced by Renovate under the auspices of the Lewes Volunteer Bureau.

The Gibbins Trust (£2,500) and the remainder of the Aftercare funds (£2,400) provided funding for the project. Although Renovate could not directly supply materials such as paint, topsoil or fencing for individual requests, householders could make applications to the Flood Appeal Fund for the cost of such items. A paid, part-time administrator, working 15 hours per week, was appointed to co-ordinate the project, located first in the CVS offices and then at Lewes Volunteer Bureau. The project had its own telephone line.

Throughout the life of the current project, regular meetings were held involving Rosey Eggar (Lewes Volunteer Bureau), Paul Rideout (SDCVS) and Lindsay Frost (Director of Planning and Environmental Services), Martin Van Der Lyn (Insurance Officer), and Atiya Lockwood (Publicity Officer) – all from Lewes District Council together with Councillor Maureen Messer (Chair of Lewes District Council). During these meetings the progress of the project was monitored and any problems addressed.

Aims and Objectives

a) To provide practical aid for all those requesting help whom the flood affected.

The flooding brought trauma and difficulties to people's lives regardless of their personal circumstances. It was decided at the start of the project that the only criterion required for obtaining help from Renovate was to have been affected by the flood. Early in the year, to let those eligible know about the project, a questionnaire was designed by staff at Lewes District and Wealden Mind. The form was intended to find out which householders would be interested in some practical help and this was included in one of the District Council mailings to those who had been flooded. In April a simplified request form was introduced (See appendix B).

b) To promote local businesses which can supply products or services for home and garden renovation.

Many local businesses, able to supply products or services, had themselves been affected by the flood. It would be valuable to support them to aid their recovery.

c) To have a supply of tools and other materials for renovation work as these will most likely have been lost or damaged during the flood.

The project's original source of tools came from 'Tools for Self Reliance' based at Southampton. A short while into the project, most of the tools were stolen from the Furniture Now! electric vehicle. The public response to this news on Southern Counties radio was wonderful and Renovate was very grateful for the number of tools provided.

After that all tools were labelled, security coded and securely stored at the Recycling Centre. An inventory was made for volunteers to check tools out and put back after use (see appendix C).

d) To advertise the project's aims, targeting both flood affected persons and potential volunteers.

Throughout the project, there were news updates both on the radio and in the local press to promote the work achieved, advertise Renovate's services and recruit volunteers. In addition, BBC TV South Today included several items about the work of Renovate. Other opportunities were used to promote the project, including window displays at Lewes Volunteer Bureau and the local Liberal Democrat MP's office on School Hill in Lewes town. Information boards were set up at a Renovate day at Lewes House and leaflets provided for a 'Flood Defence' information day at Malling Community Centre. Posters were also given to householders, following the completion of gardens, to put in their windows (see back cover).

e) To involve local communities and organisations in the project work.

Part of Renovate's advertising continued to be an effort to involve local communities and organisations. Posters were put up locally which targeted individuals, clubs, churches and neighbourhoods to provide small teams to carry out gardening and decorating tasks (see appendix D). Also, letters were sent to local banks and building societies in the hope that they might put forward small teams of employees (see appendix E). Tim Maskell, of Sussex Enterprise, sent out Renovate posters and letters together with a personal endorsement to general businesses in the area.

f) To recruit volunteers, and volunteer supervisors to provide expertise and oversee projects.

Advertisements were placed for volunteers and volunteer supervisors at the beginning of the project with a separate poster campaign. Regular radio appeals and written appeals in the Sussex Express and the Leader were made.

Public Events

The first public event where Renovate could promote its services took place on the evening of 21 February 2001 at Lewes Town Hall. There was a presentation by the Environment Agency on measures to protect property from flooding and insurance experts were available to answer questions. About 50 people attended the meeting.

A second public event was a drop-in session at the Corn Exchange on 1 March. Again information displays were available and Lewes District Council provided the tea and coffee.

In March, a social event was organised to give flood-affected people, many still living in temporary accommodation, the opportunity to meet up with friends and neighbours and share their experiences. It took place at the White Hart Hotel on the evening of 27 March when more than 200 people attended. It was a very successful evening as neighbours, who had lost touch since the flood, were able to meet up. The event also enabled the Renovate team to meet with those who were seeking practical help. Quite a number of householders filled in Renovate request forms during the evening.

On 28 April, a Renovate day was held at Lewes House with information displays by the Environment Agency and Renovate. A large selection of plants had been donated by several nursery growers (see acknowledgements page at the back) and local residents so that those affected by the floods could be invited

to choose plants for their gardens. Additional requests were received for practical help. Plants donated by Woolworths and A E Roberts were again available in early June from Malling Community Centre, Cliffe Church Hall and Lewes House.

Renovate Action days

Throughout the spring and summer of 2001, the project's work was carried out in a series of action days. Prior to each action day, work programmes were identified together with the volunteer help, meeting point, tools and other materials that would be required. These were all co-ordinated by the administrator. Beforehand, a volunteer supervisor or the administrator checked the work requested.

The requests were almost wholly for help restoring gardens. Typically, a group numbering between about 6–14 volunteers would be assigned to 2-4 volunteer supervisors and small groups would then complete several gardens between them during the course of a day. The first Renovate action day took place on 30 March. Fourteen American Express employee volunteers came to Lewes and worked on four gardens. The weather was magnificent with blue skies all day even though the forecast had been for rain. This set the pattern for the summer as almost every Action Day was dry. The pattern of tasks, number of gardens, number of employee volunteers and local people varied from day to day. On some days one small group of local volunteers worked well as a team on one or more gardens. While on another day a small group of employee volunteers spent a day in two gardens.

In total, 68 gardens and one decorating job was completed over 35 action days using over 1000 volunteer hours (see appendix F).

Teams of employee volunteers supporting Renovate action days included:

American Express, Pestalozzi, Roche, Lewes District Council, Benefits Agency, Woodcraft Folk, Southern Water, Lewes Barbican Rotary Club.

Outcomes

Providing practical aid.

The practical work was very much appreciated by those to whom the project gave help. There were requests from people in many different personal circumstances. Given their better life situations, some felt unsure as to whether they should benefit from volunteer help. However as the gardens came up for renovation they were encouraged to take up the offer of help. This was partly to publicise the project for the benefit of the community and also out of respect for understanding the trauma that everyone affected had suffered. Often, householders found encouragement and joined in with the work being undertaken by volunteers.

The following quotes testify to the appreciation of the help given:

"...it gave us a tremendous boost to have some help after all the exhausting business of managing after the flood."

Talbot Terrace resident

"What a marvellous organisation. It gives everybody a lift. It's such a change to get a smile and people saying 'How can we help?' It's the first time I've felt uplifted since the floods."

Cliffe resident

"We had been so depressed about the state of the garden, after the flood, that we couldn't face tackling any restoration work on our own. Now that Renovate has made it look so nice, I've spent many pleasant hours in the garden, getting it back to its former glory...."

Malling Street resident

" I can't say anything good enough. It's never looked so good. It's absolutely marvellous. The volunteers were so kind, cheerful, and didn't mind what they did. I'm so grateful."
Cliffe resident

There were a few instances where the work requested was not suitable for Renovate volunteers because professional help was required for such work as removing a tree or lopping a very tall hedge.

b) Promoting local businesses

Renovate was able to use some local businesses for supplies during the course of its work. Tools and other materials were bought from Elphicks and Culverwells, both of whom offered a 10% discount. Hewden Hire Centre generously offered the loan of jet sprays, free of charge and including safety checks of the equipment, to clean up patio areas spoilt by flood water and Court Mower Services kindly lent two lawnmowers for use by Renovate. The South Street fish & chip shop provided food at a good discount to the first groups of action day volunteers. All these businesses had themselves been flooded. Brewers also offered the donation of some paints and other paints at a discounted price but this, to date, has not been taken up as there have been almost no requests for decorating.

Following a small number of enquiries to the office, Renovate was also able to suggest names of local firms providing services or materials. They are members of Lewes Chamber of Commerce, East Sussex Federation of Small Businesses and Lewes Artisans, listed in a booklet that had been compiled by Lewes District Council.

c) Supplying tools and other equipment

The original donation of tools proved adequate for most of the basic gardening work and was supplemented by the purchase of gloves, first aid kit and other such accessories.

However at the end of April almost all the tools and other materials were stolen from the electric vehicle parked at Furniture Now!, as noted earlier. The public response to this loss when they heard about it on the news was tremendous with many donations of tools being offered. Unfortunately some of the offers came from too great a distance to be taken up.

Councillor Maureen Messer (outgoing Chair of LDC) generously purchased from her budget a strimmer, some loppers and secateurs for the project.

In July the trustees of the Lewes Flood Appeal made an award of £400 to Renovate, particularly for the purchase of 2 strimmers, 2 loppers, extension leads, and safety equipment. In all, provision could now be made for the equipping of two teams of volunteers.

In most cases householders were able to provide garden refuse bags and deal with the disposal of their own rubbish. Renovate could also provide strong bags for a small cost and on a number of days volunteers generously took rubbish home to compost or down to the tip for recycling. However in one or two cases the disposal of a large amount of rubbish remained a problem with no easy solution for a householder unable to pay for any service.

d) Advertising the project's aims

It was felt that Renovate was well advertised in its targeting of potential clients and volunteer recruitments throughout the project. Also there was good press, radio and television coverage to promote the work.

However, the recruitment of volunteers remained a challenge. Although Renovate was more or less able to meet the demand because the return of householders to their properties was staggered it was difficult to fulfil all the requests promptly. By the end of the summer, organisations such as Southern Water had completed their offer of help and other local individuals who had contributed much now had other commitments. There was no response to any of the letters sent out to local firms and businesses. Perhaps a more personal

approach with visits to these establishments to explain the project's work might have had more impact than written requests.

Renovate linked its requests for employee volunteers to the Active Communities Challenge, sponsored by the government. Unpaid work is a generous donation of time and effort and carries implications for the type of work volunteers are willing to do and their availability (see below).

e) Involving local communities and organisations

The problem of recruiting volunteers from the local communities has been addressed in d) above.

There were though other ways in which Renovate received positive help. The Nutty Wizard Café and Malling Community Centre both lent their premises as a base for several action days. Southover Growers, Goldcliffe Nurseries and Homebase gave some plants for the project. Lloyds TSB donated £100 by way of financial support and the contributions of other local organisations were noted earlier in this report.

f) Recruiting volunteers

The standard of work and commitment of volunteers involved in the project was high. Most spent enjoyable and rewarding days or half days and were able to see gardens transformed as the result of their efforts.

"...incredibly enjoyable, very rewarding, lovely being able to communicate and go some way towards helping restore a devastated area. I just love being able to do it – knowing it's helping others. It's a lovely way to be part of a community and how something good comes out of devastation. Always the good side to the dark!"

Volunteer Supervisor

"I have thoroughly enjoyed it. I do so admire the strength of those affected by the flood and how they have coped with their tragedy."

Volunteer

"I'm so pleased that I've joined the Renovate group."

Volunteer supervisor

However there was also criticism about some of the gardens worked in. Although Renovate's only criterion for inclusion in the scheme was that people had been flood- affected nevertheless some lived in apparently affluent circumstances. Some volunteers felt that these people could easily have paid for renovation work themselves and that there must be other more deserving cases.

Renovate countered this by explaining that all those affected by the flood had suffered traumatically and were extremely appreciative of practical aid whatever their circumstances. This sort of help gave them the encouragement to continue the work on their own. In addition a number of donations were made to the Renovate fund by some of those who had received help, thus enabling further investment in the project to support more people.

In one case, a volunteer felt that because the clearing of a drainage ditch lay outside someone's property it was not work that should have been undertaken as he had been told he would be helping individuals affected by the flood. This example emphasises the need to be both accurate and sensitive when briefing volunteers for the work they are going to undertake. More problematical were a couple of instances where gardens had obviously been neglected prior to the flood and an apparently able-bodied owner stood by and watched restorative work. This annoyed one or two volunteers.

Overall, the volunteer groups gained through the satisfaction of completing a task, the opportunity of working with others thus enabling team development, learning new skills, sharing the experience, as well as seeing the delight of householders when the garden had been completed.

Other Business

Insurance

Lewes Volunteer Bureau has cover for Employers Liability, Public Liability and Personal Accident. Therefore volunteer supervisors and volunteers recruited through the bureau would be covered by insurance. Insurance for employee volunteers was the responsibility of the companies concerned and this was checked with them. Martin Van der Lyn, the Insurance Officer at Lewes District Council, provided additional advice on insurance queries and procured a gardening endorsement from Cornhill Insurers on behalf of Renovate.

Help and Advice

Throughout the project, there were calls to the Renovate office with a number of queries. These included requests for information on flood defence and property insurance, concern about neighbours affected by the flood, how to apply to the Lewes Flood Appeal fund, where to buy such items as fencing materials while supporting a local firm, and recommendations for odd job persons and gardeners. (Some, often elderly people, would be willing to pay for services but are afraid of being conned. They were put in touch with Anchor Staying Put in Lewes). One MA research student wanted contacts in order to find out how those with mental health problems had been affected by the devastation caused by the flood. Any further donations of furniture or similar were directed to Furniture Now!.

There were also various media requests over the months for suitable candidates to interview regarding their experiences of the flooding and how it affected them. The Milk Shake Company, working for the Discovery channel was particularly interested in a child's view of the flooding.

Renovate – Future

It would be good to use the resources and experiences gained through Renovate to continue it as a project for the benefit of the whole community, not only those affected by the flood.

Quite a number of people, because of their life circumstances, require support for gardening and other practical work. Some requests of this nature have already been received. Using volunteers means however, that some form of assessment would have to be made to ascertain the appropriateness of such help. The experiences of the Renovate project has highlighted that volunteers are more comfortable giving help to those in obvious need and it is important not to exploit the volunteers' goodwill.

Renovate is now excellently equipped with tools for further gardening projects and it has a small core of local and experienced volunteers. Ideally, there should be a paid administrator to make home visits for assessment, provide publicity and co-ordinate and supervise the volunteer work undertaken. The administrator would also be responsible for the recruitment of volunteers. An interest has been expressed by Ringmer Community College to set up work experience for some of its students. User Q, a mental health team based at Mind, and someone speaking on behalf of a Youth Offending team have both expressed an interest in helping in the community.

It is very much hoped that although the project has now finished in its present form, there will be a future for Renovate in the local community.

Clare Hurworth
Renovate Administrator
November 2001

Renovate Project Report

Appendix A - Acknowledgements

For general support and financial help

Gibbins Trust
Lewes District Council
Lewes District and Wealden Mind
Lewes Flood Aftercare Group
Southdown Council for Voluntary Service (CVS)
Sussex Enterprise
Trustees of Lewes Flood Appeal

Storage of tools

Furniture Now!
Lewes District Council Recycling Centre

Publicity

BBC Southern Counties Radio
BBC South Today
Lewes News
Liberal Democrat Office Window
Sussex Express
Southern FM Radio
The Argus
The Mid-Sussex Leader

Action Day Teams

American Express
Benefits Agency
Lewes Barbican Rotary Club
Lewes District Council
Pestalozzi
Roche
Southern Water
Woodcraft Folk

Services, Donations and Discounts

Chubbs, Barcombe
Court Mower Services
Culverwells
Elphicks
Goldcliffe Nurseries
Hewden Hire Centre
Homebase
Lloyds TSB
Malling Community Centre
Southover Growers
South Street Fish Bar
The Nutty Wizard Café
Woolworths and A E Roberts (plants)
Tools for Self Reliance

And a big thank you to all the local volunteers and volunteer supervisors, and also to anyone omitted from the above list who should have been included.

reNOVAte

Appendix B Work Request

Name

Permanent Address

.....

Temporary Address

.....

.....

Contact Details: Current Tel No

Mobile

e-mail

Work needed.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

When can work start?.....

What equipment can you provide?.....

.....

Can you be involved?.....

Are you interested in information on interior design?.....

*A Lewes Volunteer Bureau Project (01273) 488990
5 Lansdown Place, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2JT*

Taken by..... Date request made.....

reNOVAte tools

Appendix C

Tools	How many?	Out	Returned
Petrol Strimmer			
Goggles			
Ear Muffs			
Gloves			
Petrol can			
2 Stroke oil			
Mixer bottle			
Instruction book			
Electric strimmer			
Instructions & goggles			
Power breaker			
Extension lead			
Fork			
Hand fork			
Spade			
Trowel			
Rake or lawn rake			
Hoe			
Lawn edger			
Shears			
Long-handled shears			
Secateurs			
Loppers			
Pruning saw			
Jet spray hose attachment			
Broom			

Date:

Please note all tools borrowed and check them off on return.

If any tool is damaged or lost, please contact Renovate on (01273) 488990 as soon as possible.

Please return all tools shortly after 4.00pm as the recycling centre closes at 4.30pm (4.00pm on Fridays).

Thank you.

Target Teams

Can your firm, club,
church or neighbourhood
help Renovate?

By providing teams of
2-5 people to carry out
gardening or decorating tasks
for a day or a half-day.

Contact reNOVAte on
(01273) 488990.
We have many requests to
fulfill.

Appendix E

reNOVAte

a Lewes Volunteer Bureau Project

May 2001

Dear

The Renovate Project was set up to help people returning to flood affected property in the town, after the drying out process has been completed. Its main aim is to provide volunteer help with simple home and garden renovation work such as decorating and gardening.

I am linking my request for volunteers to help with renovation tasks with the Active Communities Challenge. If you have already signed up you will be aware that employers in the public, private and voluntary sector are asked to give their employees the equivalent of a day's paid time to volunteer. More details are available from www.corpcommunityinvestment.org.uk or your local volunteer bureau.

We have received 90 requests from householders who have been flooded and we know there will be more requests in the coming months as people move back into their homes. The majority of the requests focus on help with the gardens. This is an ideal activity for a small group of volunteers for a half-day, full day, or an evening and the tasks help team building, provide a satisfactory outcome and a positive involvement in the community. Each team is allocated a volunteer supervisor who liaises with the householder and ensures the appropriate tools and materials are available.

Our experience with the teams from American Express has been very positive and the householders have been delighted with the work done. Twenty-two gardens have been completed. The employee volunteers have worked hard and enjoyed themselves.

There is still a lot more to do. We are grateful to Sussex Enterprise for helping us contact you to ask whether you can encourage some of your staff to put one or more teams together. Please help us to meet the requests we are receiving for Renovate to make a practical difference.

Clare Hurworth, the project administrator, and I are happy to answer any question you might have and also to discuss practical arrangements. We look forward to hearing from you and thank you for your interest.

Yours sincerely

Rosey Eggar
Organiser, Lewes Volunteer Bureau

5 Lansdown Place, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2JT
(01273) 488990
lewesvb@care4free.net

Appendix F

Lewes Volunteer Bureau
Renovate Action Days

Renovate Action Days					
Action Day	Completed	Volunteer	Volunteers	Hours	
	Gardens	Supervisors			
30/03/01	4	4	26	150	
19/04/01	3	3	14	85	
20/04/01	5	4	16	100	
25/04/01	2	2	16	90	
27/04/01	3	3	4	33	
28/04/01		2		8	
02/05/01	2	2		10	
04/05/01	2	2		10	
10/05/01	2	3		13	
12/05/01	1	1	2	7	
16/05/01	1		1	3	
18/05/01	2	1	3	18	
19/05/01	1		2	12	Decorating
24/05/01			10	10	
25/05/01		1	4	22	
01/06/01	4	1	3	18	
08/06/01	8	3	12	72	
12/06/01	3		4	12	
13/06/01	5	3	22	88	
22/06/01	2		4	10	
23/06/01	1		2	4	
29/06/01	2		2	8	
30/06/01			2	5	
05/07/01	1		1	4	
06/07/01	2		3	13	
07/07/01	1		2	6	
14/07/01	1		1	3	
24/07/01	2		9	24.5	
25-27/07/01	1		4	75	
31/07/01	2		5	25	
10/08/01	2		4	22	
17/08/01	2		3	15	
21/08/01	2		7	16	
19/10/01	1		3	9	
Total	34	35	191	1000.5	