

# SARAH GARDNER CMgr FCMI

Founder & Chair

Serving our Superheroes



## WHO ARE SERVING OUR SUPERHEROES?

Serving our Superheroes started out as a project to supply laundry bags to frontline care workers to help prevent the cross-contamination of the Covid-19 virus from their uniforms. Now, as a registered charity, they have grown and brought the community together to support those in need. Serving Our Superheroes has won the Chamber of Commerce Business Award for Best Charity and the International Stevie Awards donating over 31,500 items worth approximately £355,800.

Sarah started the project in April 2020 using her skills as a Chartered Manager to respond quickly to the Covid-19 crisis to deliver resources to frontline workers, including NHS staff and local care homes, right when they needed them most.

## PUTTING PLANS IN ACTION

“The main challenge was getting as many laundry bags out as soon as possible. Front line healthcare workers were at risk of bringing the virus home on their uniforms to their families.”

To protect them, thousands of laundry bags were needed quickly. I couldn't make them all myself, but with my Chartered Management skills I was sure I could coordinate a community effort.

“The first challenge was engaging people in the community who could make the bags and reaching enough people to be able to meet such a large need.” Sarah worked with the community to safely deliver the bags, working in constant communication to meet demand where it was needed most, all whilst home-schooling two young children alongside her day job.

## STRATEGICALLY REACTING TO CHANGE

When the need changed, so did Sarah's strategic approach. The need grew from hospitals and care homes, but also seeing how homeless people could benefit, Sarah widened her network and resourced additional items such as toiletries, towels and food parcels.

“Getting the levels of supply to match demand was challenging as the needs were constantly changing.”

I had to be ready to adapt, I was in constant communication with my volunteers so that I could be flexible with what I donated, depending on what was needed and where.

## USING MANAGEMENT SKILLS WHERE IT MATTERS

Sarah's management and leadership training supported her in more ways than one. Project Management was key in ensuring those who needed help got it, but thinking outside of the box and using her experience to communicate effectively was key. Ensuring those who were volunteering their time and resources to support the effort felt valued in the process.

“I encouraged recipients to send in photos, which I'd share through social media to those who support. Reaching out to community groups and networks like the Rotary and local resident's associations to support donations. I arranged for 'open award certificates' to be made for some of the volunteers to say thank you.”

“A little bit can make a big difference, (help a little to help a lot). Even little contributions added together make a difference. Everyone had a role to play and everyone's contribution was important, I made sure that all the volunteers knew this.”

As well as helping those in need with the items, the volunteers who have been making the items, many of them living alone and shielding have said it has given them a purpose and helped to keep them feeling needed, and has really helped their mental health during lockdown. The experiences of helping during the pandemic will stay with them. For some it has given them confidence to go onto other things and take on additional voluntary work.”

“I am a big advocate of making your own time count. As a Chartered Manager I'm very aware of making the most of my time management skills. I get up early in the mornings. I look for opportunities to work and try not to waste any time. I want to achieve great things in life and help as many people as I can, and hopefully inspire others along the way. Being a Chartered Manager has given me the confidence to really push myself and get the most from others.”