

HEALTH AND WELLBEING PROJECT



END OF YEAR REPORT 1ST APRIL 2020 – 31ST MARCH 2021

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OUR AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

At LD:NorthEast we aim to help people who have a learning disability, to have the same quality and access to health services and health related activities as everyone else.

The Health and Wellbeing Project provides light touch support for people with learning disabilities to promote physical and mental health and wellbeing.

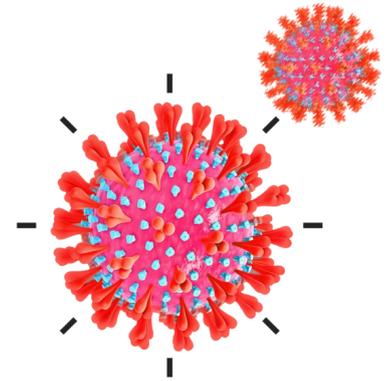
The Project assists in providing positive interrelations between health services and people with a learning disability. Ultimately, this is to drive down health inequalities, improve overall health outcomes and experiences.

By providing support to attend health appointments, this helps to reduce fears and anxieties which enables people to have the right conversations with health care professionals. This allows for further knowledge and understanding of what to expect from services and professionals, and improves individuals' overall experience.

We deliver appropriate and meaningful educational programmes and workshops, to raise awareness of health conditions and self management. This enables people to gain a better understanding of their health, and allows people to identify signs and symptoms. Early detection and prevention is key to minimise health conditions becoming serious problems.

Covid response

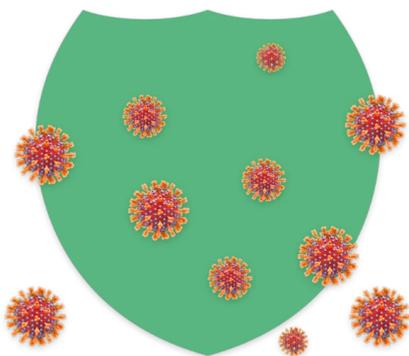
When the government announced on the 16th March 2020 that a pandemic was imminent there was so much uncertainty and apprehension for many of us. These unprecedented times were unlike anything most of us have ever experienced before. For those with a learning disability this news was even more frightening and daunting.



The implementation of government guidelines such as social distancing measures, self-isolation and how the virus was contracted was confusing to many of us. For people with a learning disability understanding social distancing, the effects of the pandemic, and how to stay safe was even more confusing and difficult to understand. Many of the people we support were completely overwhelmed by the situation and did not know where or who to turn to for reassurance and advice.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for this project has never been greater. We have adapted the project's outcomes to be able to support people through these unprecedented times.

Over this last reporting period, people's lives and routines have been significantly impacted owing to the Pandemic. For those with a learning disability changes to routine can be difficult to understand and deal with. Many people who the project supports do not have family networks or any formal support so are generally very socially isolated. Add the pandemic into the equation and those people become even more isolated, frightened, and extremely vulnerable.



At the onset of the pandemic we established that many people were extremely scared and had difficulties understanding the seriousness of the virus, how to stay safe and follow the guidelines. This was extremely worrying especially for those with underlying health conditions who were not aware that they were at a greater risk. Many people were still going out, putting themselves in unnecessary danger and did not quite understand how to socially distance.

We distributed easy read literature to all our beneficiaries together with follow up phone calls to explain about the virus, the guidelines and how to stay safe. We also distributed packs and certificates and other items to help encourage those who found shielding challenging and isolating. These resources helped them to understand the importance of staying at home and made them feel proud that they were helping their communities and the NHS.



The project identified the importance of remaining in contact with people, people who are already extremely socially isolated and in turn often suffer from low mood. We dedicated our resources and conducted daily phone calls to help offer guidance and support throughout this whole reporting period. The impact of the pandemic had a significant effect on people's mental health and we believe giving them our time was of vital importance to help stabilise low mental health and to prevent further social isolation. (see case study!.)

Trying to maintain good mental health throughout this time was very difficult for so many. For those who were struggling, staff undertook face to face wellbeing door step checks to provide further reassurances. We also supported people to take daily walks to aid their mental wellbeing, whilst maintaining Government guidelines on Social Distancing. Many People saw us as their only support and safety net. 97 Wellbeing walks and 132 face to face wellbeing checks were conducted.

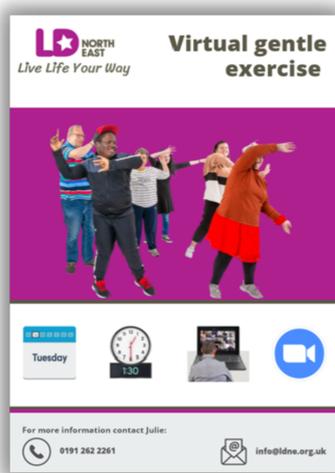
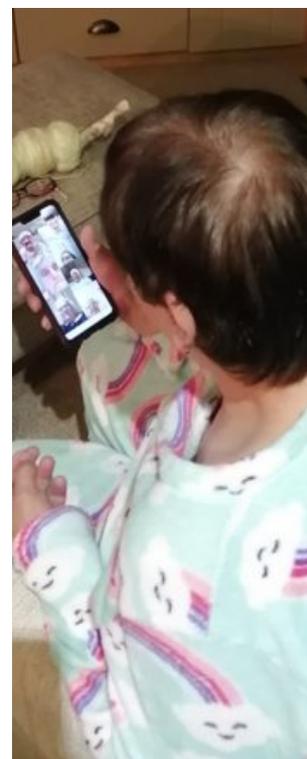


For those who were shielding and at greater risk of catching the virus, prescriptions were organised and delivered or pharmacy deliveries were arranged. The team also purchased weekly food provisions for beneficiaries and delivered food parcels. The project was a lifeline for many who could not get out to get shopping and medication. 408 shopping trips were conducted. 121 medication and health related appointments were made. 42 of these included prescriptions orders and delivery of medication.

Maintaining regular contact with our beneficiaries enabled us to monitor people's health. A number of people believed that they could not contact their GP, and in some cases people felt they did not want to 'bother' their doctors. Indeed, many were too scared to go to appointments or even hospital. This regular contact enabled us to advise individuals to contact their GP and still go for hospital check-ups.

The project helped to organise GP telephone consultations and also supported people with consultation phone calls. We also supported people to attend hospital appointments which ranged from hospital scans to cancer reviews. Without this support, it is without doubt that beneficiaries would not have made contact and sought medical assistance. We provided support during 39 telephone consultations and medical appointments. (see case study 2.)

So many people were telling us how a lack of routine and having regular contact with others was affecting them and impacting on their mental wellbeing. We sourced loan technology equipment through NTC Assistive Technology in the forms of iPads and tablets. We set these up for people together with Wi-Fi dongles and gave demonstrations on how to use the equipment. Some people required a lot more support than others so we created easy read literature as a further aid. We devised a weekly programme of activities to keep people connected. Virtual activities included a book club, Catch up with Friends, music sessions and quizzes. Additionally, we hosted Hate Crime, How to Stay Safe Online, and How to Stay Safe during Covid sessions. We also held a weekly Big Chat where people could ask advice and gain further knowledge and reassurances.



We recognised that people were becoming inactive due to a lack of routine and not accessing the community. As a result we organised a weekly gentle exercise virtual class. This was well received by everyone who took part, as the sessions were fun and informal and ultimately boosted people's moral and mental wellbeing. We had 308 attendances to our gentle exercise sessions.

Case study 1

Mary is a 65 year old lady who has learning disabilities and lives independently in North Tyneside. Mary suffers from a range of complex mental health conditions which affects many aspects of her life. Mary has difficulty in maintaining stable relationships, and is often overwhelmed by negative feelings such as distress, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Throughout her life, Mary has had numerous admissions into long stay hospitals.

The national lockdown and the sudden stop to her regular routines and social interactions had an immediate impact on Mary. Additionally, she did not initially understand why she needed to stay at home and continued to travel on public transport and walk the streets to find people to chat to. The pandemic had such a negative effect on Mary, she felt even more frightened, depressed and anxious.

Recognising the impact that this pandemic would have on Mary, we set up wellbeing calls twice a day. These calls were extensive as she was often in significant distress for which we needed to provide further reassurance. We were also able to explain the health risks posed by Covid and reinforce the importance of staying at home.

As restrictions eased we adapted this contact to include weekly doorstep visits and walks. Mary valued this physical interaction as it provided her with an opportunity to leave the house, interact with others and feel active again. We saw immediately how these to face to face visits dramatically improved her wellbeing.

Without our support, it is highly likely that Mary would not have been able to cope and her mental health would have significantly deteriorated. All of these interventions were crucial supporting Mary to manage the challenges of lockdown.

Case study 2

Tracey is a 65 year old female with a learning disability who lives independently in North Tyneside. Tracey suffers with ongoing respiratory problems and develops reoccurring chest infections which often develops to Pneumonia and hospital admissions. Tracey finds it difficult to identify signs and symptoms when she becomes unwell nor does she seek the right help or medical assistance. Tracey's health can deteriorate rapidly and become critical very quickly.

Throughout the pandemic we conducted daily wellbeing phone calls. On one of these calls we identified that Tracey did not seem herself. We asked Tracey several questions and it appeared that Tracey had the onset of a chest infection. Knowing her complex medical history we immediately contacted her GP with her consent and organised a telephone consultation.

Tracey was prescribed antibiotics which we collected and delivered to her. We increased the wellbeing calls to monitor her health to ensure her health did not worsen which we felt it did. Again, we contacted the GP who arranged for X rays and a scan at the hospital. Tracey initially refused to attend, however with our support we encouraged her to go and accompanied her to attend.

Further medication was prescribed and we are happy to report that her condition did improve, which prevented in any hospital admissions.

PROGRESS BY THE NUMBERS



456

Telephone wellbeing
calls made



121

GP, pharmacy, health
and other medical
related calls made



39

Attendances to support
with medical
appointments



97

Wellbeing walks



132

Well being checks



308

Attendances to gentle
exercise

Challenges

Over the last twelve months the mental and physical health and wellbeing of the people we have engaged with has really suffered. We have been working hard to keep adapting our project in order to best support people during the pandemic. Once lockdown restrictions were lifted, on both occasions we gave more guidance and encouragement so people could start to feel comfortable about going out and about again.

Many of our beneficiaries felt anxious and did not feel comfortable to go back out in to the community. We started up our various groups, with activities and cooking sessions so that people could return to their routines to help combat social isolation.

It has been challenging for us as an organisation to ensure people's safety and the compliance with government guidelines. We have been supporting people in bubbles with a limited capacity, therefore delivering twice as many groups to be able to deliver these sessions. We felt that these activities were much needed to help people get back into their community, into regular routines and to aid with their mental wellbeing.

As we look towards the post pandemic future, we hope to transition into the 'new normal'. We will continue to support our beneficiaries with Covid related support, including vaccinations and lateral flow testing. We look forward to bringing more of our activities back to full capacity and delivering workshops around screening and other health related subjects.



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