

Moving from crisis to recovery - case study

This case study may be of interest to any third sector organisation who is having to adapt and learn as they go in uncertain times.

In 2020 Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) supported eight projects affected by the COVID-19 crisis to evaluate and learn about their response to the crisis. The aim of this support was to strengthen their response and their recovery, by improving what they do or guiding future plans and strategies. This work was supported by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Alternatives Dundee provides therapeutic support over the telephone, video or webchat to women experiencing pregnancy loss. Alternatives Dundee adapted all their support for online delivery. **Amanda**, Lead Youth Support Worker at Alternatives Dundee, shares her learning.

Why did we get involved in this peer learning programme?

We came on board to look at how to plan our recovery in the best way for the team, volunteers and clients. We were interested in finding out whether the activities we had adapted during the crisis made a difference and whether the team coped well with the move to online support. Initially, we set out to learn:

- What workers/volunteers do we need to recruit in order to amplify some of our COVID response activities?
- Should we continue to support clients online as well as face to face?

What are we learning about our work through this crisis?

a) Using social media helps us reach people

Before the crisis we would send out flyers to GPs and agencies across Dundee. During the pandemic we weren't able to do this, so we used social media instead. We also promoted our service through livestreams/chats with other agencies. This helped us showcase ourselves and our work effectively (much better than a flyer!). To promote our service one of the things we did was pilot a new project, sharing kindness bags during Baby Loss Awareness Week. We got a lot of **new self-referrals directly** from running that campaign. We also had a look at how many **likes and follows we had on our social media** platforms. On our Facebook pages we had an increase of 170 likes through pandemic. That is quite positive. We know we are reaching a wider audience. The **new self-referrals** show that we have expanded our reach beyond Dundee as we now have referrals in Perth and Angus.

b) Our work is transferrable online and is effective for most clients

From April to August 2020, we delivered support through telephone, video call (Zoom) and a new webchat service. As the lockdown restrictions began to ease in September we were able to offer a limited face to face service for those who were unable to engage with virtual support. We understood that we had to return to face-to-face work as there were some clients

who had tried to do support sessions digitally where it was either not comfortable or it was too high a risk (e.g. if the client was feeling suicidal). Our online or phone support works well for about for 75% of our clients.

Through this programme I planned to do a survey on our impact but realised we had already collected a lot of evidence. I **analysed the quotes** from women who had received face to face support (between October and December 2020) in comparison to those who had received online support and the impact was the same. The analysis showed us that the benefits are quite similar; women are feeling better and value a space to talk about what's going on in their lives. Quotes like these are typical from both our online and face to face support.

"The support I have received has been amazing. I couldn't have gotten through this time without you. I feel that the support I got was helpful as it was specific to what I'm going through" - (Client)

Our **stats** also showed us that we delivered more one-to-one sessions this year in comparison to previous years (50 more). We have seen an increase in the number of sessions we've been able to deliver with our one-to-one support. Clients typically have more sessions with us when accessing support remotely, which shows that clients are developing meaningful, long term engagements. That's been a positive of online support.

Some of our clients are more vulnerable and in their case we need to find a way to continue supporting them in person.

How is this learning helpful to our organisation?

Although part of what we planned to find out was what skills we would need in the

future and who should we recruit what we actually learnt was how helpful social media is in promoting our service and what difference the online support has made.

We recently submitted a **funding application to extend the kindness bags** projects in 2021 - this bid was successful after using the evidence gathered to tell our story. We also plan to:

- **Continue using blended support**
- **Upskill our staff team and volunteer team** to become trained in delivering online support

Amanda's tips for others

Look at what evidence you have already collected (quotes you might have collected, social media comments and likes and referral information). You might be able to use this to tell you what difference you are making with the services you have adapted. We realised we didn't need another survey to gather this information.

Throughout the crisis we made many changes to our services to maintain our support to the community. It has been good to have time to look back at this, to reflect on what we did, why we did and what we are taking forward and leaving behind.

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