



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 and 2021 Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) supported sixteen projects affected by the COVID-19 crisis to evaluate and learn about their response to the 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.

Curnie Clubs is a project run by Fife Alcohol Support Services, providing peer support for vulnerable people in Fife experiencing loneliness and isolation. They adapted their work by introducing 121 phone support, running groups online and in video chat and extending the age range of people they supported. They used social media to reach members and promote the clubs. Jo, Project Support Worker, shares their experiences of learning from the crisis.

Why did we get involved in this peer learning programme?

During the Covid-19 crisis we started moving away from old ways of working and felt the need to evaluate how we are working, what we are delivering, what's having the best impact. We needed to know what's not working and make changes accordingly. The team felt stretched and that we couldn't sustain the level of activity we had been delivering during the crisis.

We wanted to explore these questions:

- What's not working? What can we let go of in the future?
- How has social media helped us? Should we use this more in the future?

What are we learning about our work through this crisis?

1) We have a better sense of what a hybrid model will look like



Some of the changes we introduced, such as sharing information on social media helped us reach new members experiencing isolation. Our **stats** show that there was an increase in our membership during this time.



Online delivery can be more accessible – but not for everyone. By **listening** to our service users we found that while it worked for the majority of our members, some experienced barriers to engaging online (such as distractions in the home, lack of device, lack of confidence in using digital devices). This reminded us to be more aware about service user needs and looking

at gaps. Hybrid ways of working will come at a cost both in terms of technology and training clients to use it.

2) We overdelivered in the early stages of the crisis



Feedback from staff showed that they felt extremely stretched and fatigued in the early stages of the crisis. We offered new ways for people to engage with Curnie Clubs and broadened the age range of members without any additional capacity. We realised by trying to accommodate new ways of working we also needed to be mindful of the pressure of the team.

Many services users, particularly older client groups, **told us** they found the 121 phonecalls helpful in coping during the crisis. As a team, we struggled with having the time to do these in addition to the online groups.

How is this helpful to our organisation?

Service planning for the future

We will keep 121 phonecalls, as it's the only way to connect with some of our clients. If we want to reduce isolation and loneliness, we should be working across all age groups and technical abilities.

Supporting the team

The whole of society changed overnight and that was not easy for any of us, but staff had a double whammy of a greater workload and a total change in working practice. Staff welfare and being mindful of the mental and physical health of staff is a more important job for management than it ever.

We need to ensure we have the right skills within the team to continue to support new client groups. There are three distinct groups who require different skill sets from the team. We need to mentor young people, support the social and personal development of the 26 - 55's and provide stimuli required for our older groups. This then presents a challenge to service design, delivery and skill sets of support staff.

Funding applications

We are currently looking at new sources of funding for Curnie Clubs. We will use this learning to shape our applications for future funding.

Our tips for other organisations

- **Evaluation is ongoing process** - one of the most important lessons we have taken from this is how to continually assess ourselves. This has helped to keep us healthy and adaptable throughout the pandemic. These are exceptional times and the ideas of the frontline staff and the clients have never been more important in our constant assessment of our service.

Contact details

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