VS6 – Working together to build a stronger Liverpool City Region

Mental Health VCFSE Sector Assembly

Final Recommendations

1st July 2020

1. ADDITIONAL STAFF TRAINING

2. CIRCULATE GUIDANCE ON SAFE REOPENING OF COMMUNITY VENUES

3. IMPROVE ACCESS TO PPE AND VITAL EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES

4. SHARE NATIONAL EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

5. WELL-BEING SUPPORT FOR STAFF, VOLUNTEERS AND SERVICE USERS

6. IMPROVED COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN INFRASTRUCTURE & SERVICE DELIVERY ORGANISATIONS

VS6 Partnership recently held a series of online events focusing on COVID-19 and the impact of the pandemic on specific issues facing communities in the Liverpool City Region. This report summarises the feedback received from attendees of the Mental Health Assembly event, and discusses the themes that were identified with recommendations and next steps to support and develop mental health resilience in our communities.

As part of the VS6 series of events that focussed on Covid 19 an assembly exploring Mental Health issues was held on 1st July 2020. It was a reflective event with great depth to the discussions which demonstrated the importance of the subject to organisations and their beneficiaries. It was a pleasure to meet and engage with so many dedicated services and groups from across the city region.

The two workshops explored the impact of Covid 19 on both organisations and service users. If we do not recognise the impact on ourselves our impact for service users is reduced. A resume of the lively and frank discussions are set out in this report with recommendations for further action.

Together we are a collective of action focussed groups. The assembly was a well-attended and important opportunity to air thoughts and ideas which will lead to future actions for us to undertake as well as inform cross sector stakeholders.

Thank you to those who contributed to the creation of this document.

Racheal Jones

Chair of the Assembly and Chief Officer of One Knowsley.

This assembly, held via zoom, attracted a large number of participants. It was a facilitated discussion with the notes resulting forming the bulk of this report. It should be noted that the Covid 19 environment remains fast changing and fluid. Therefore, some of the comments made on 1st July, may well be out of date at the time that this report is published. They are retained as they form part of the record of how people were feeling and could be helpful in any lessons learned and future planning thinking.

Six Point Plan for LCR Mental Health Organisations

Recommendation 1: Additional staff training

1.1 Negotiate access to Local Authority training courses. Local authorities have an excellent reputation for staff training. An extra three seats in a training venue (or conference call) will not significantly increase costs and would benefit the sector hugely.

1.2 Roll-out of training included Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) to build mental health resilience.

1.3 Sector leaders could benefit from crisis management and leadership training from infrastructure organisations.

Recommendation 2: Circulate guidance on safe reopening of community venues

2.1 There should be a general circulation of the regime needed to reopen community venues.

2.2 Risk assessment models for different activities in different kinds of spaces should be shared City Region wide.

Recommendation 3: Improve access to PPE and vital equipment & supplies

3.1 Bulk purchasing of vital equipment and supplies such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), cleaning materials and other items vital to enable safe operation should be explored. This will enable organisations to receive the items they require at a lower cost and also remove the stress/uncertainty which exists.

3.2 Facilitate access to these supplies through dedicated funding pots.

Recommendation 4: Share national examples of good practice

4.1 Examples of good practice from other areas should be shared with all stakeholders in the region.

Recommendation 5: Well-being support for staff, volunteers and service users

5.1 Working as a whole system to tackle mental health.

5.2 Well-being elements of video calls should be introduced for staff, volunteers and service users with clear understanding of what the next step is for those staff and volunteers identifying issues.

5.3 There should be increased connection with Mental Health Charities – many of whom offer "well-being at work" training for both managers, staff and volunteers.

Recommendation 6: Improved communications between infrastructure & service delivery organisations

6.1 The sector infrastructure organisations communicated Covid 19 news, changes in funders policies etc in regular bulletins. This has been maintained throughout the lockdown. Many funders will have communicated to organisations. Home working and furlough may have disrupted internal communication within service delivery organisation. It is recommended that additional recipients, within service delivery organisations, are added.

Workshop A – The impact of Covid-19 on organisations

What effects has Covid-19 had on your staff?

- The impact of economic factors on staff wellbeing has been considerable. Some staff have had to be laid off, others have been furloughed. Freelance staff are facing a particularly precarious set of circumstances with less well considered and comprehensive government support available to them. All of this has its toll.
- Home working has eroded the boundaries between working and domestic life. This has often resulted in staff working longer, more varied hours, struggling to take adequate time for themselves outside of work, and struggling to move in and out of a productive working headspace. Many staff do not have dedicated work space at home.
- Staff burnout is a growing concern. As time has gone on, and the urgency and adrenaline of the initial Covid-19 response mobilisation has begun to diminish, more staff seem to be struggling with their own mental health and are feeling over exhausted. The lack of holiday destinations has caused leave periods to be postponed which further adds to the problem.
- New starters have faced particular challenges when trying to integrate into teams and adjust to their new roles and responsibilities.
- The personal impacts of the crisis have been affecting staff – uncertainty over the future, illness, childcare, concern for friends and family members, bereavement are all factors external to work that impact on work.

What effects has Covid-19 had on your volunteers?

- Some volunteers are struggling with the prospect of returning to volunteering having spent the last three months isolating and still not feeling like things are totally safe. Other volunteers are keen to get back out there, having struggled with the loss of routine or having missed their volunteering activities.
- Some volunteers previously involved in face-to-face work, e.g. counsellors, have been retrained so they can deliver remotely and continue with their roles.
- Some volunteers were lost at the start of lockdown because they needed to shield or take on additional family caring responsibilities. Other volunteers were gained with many furloughed staff keen to do something with their time (though many of them are now beginning to return to work and engaging less). There may be an increase in volunteers from the newly workless.

What organisational issues has Covid-19 caused?

- Some organisations are having to reinvent themselves because their models of delivery are, and will likely continue to be, unsuitable for a while.
- Some organisations have transferred the delivery of many of their services online and have been struggling to cope with an increase in demand.
- Organisations have had struggles with IT equipment since the initiation of homeworking – both the expense of procurement and the logistics of it operating effectively at a time of exceptionally high demand on broadband. Some staff have been left having to use personal devices due to varyingly deficient levels of access to IT equipment within the organisation.

What challenges are you facing in resuming face-to-face operations in physical spaces?

- A lack of clear guidance is making the return to face-to face working challenging.
- Spaces that were previously fit for purpose are now too small for groups of the size that has previously used it. Space needs to be used differently or group sizes reduced. This is a challenge both physically and financially.
- The additional requirements for cleaning spaces between usages is onerous and creates a particular challenge where organisations are looking to make savings by sharing spaces with one another.
- Many clients are afraid to use public transport but without it have no means of attending sessions.
- It's not clear when or how face-to-face delivery with clients who are shielding can be reintroduced.
- It's a challenge for staff with childcare responsibilities to resume face-to-face delivery before schools re-open.
- Outdoor delivery is unreliable because it's weather dependent, there's also a real lack of public toilets, particularly accessible ones.
- Ensuring staff, volunteers and clients are consistent in their adherence to social distancing measures is a real challenge – it can be easy for momentarily forget and slip up.

What do you need in terms of support to deal with all of these issues? Who do you need these things from?

- Substantial long-term investment.
- Funding for business as usual activity as well as for Covid-19 response work.
- Funding for infrastructure organisations, they've been invaluable in galvanising local groups to respond to the pandemic.
- Joint purchasing of resources, and in particular PPE and domestic hygiene products such as cleaning materials, so as to benefit from economies of scale. "In Kind Direct" are a possible source of support for this.
- Better, centralised provision of support for sector's staff akin to that which is provided to our colleagues in the statutory organisations.
- Better business support and advice from local authorities, particularly for smaller organisations
- Clear guidelines for clients on safety and hygiene in a variety of formats including Easy Read

The "who do you need these things from" element of this question was not easy to answer. Some of the points above are relatively easy to signpost and source. The first three require wide ranging conversations (some of which are already taking place) and, perhaps, an organisational revisit to financing of business operations and overall business planning.

Workshop B – The impact of Covid-19 on service users

What's been your experience of Covid-19's impact on people's mental health?

- Anxiety, stress, boredom, fear for the consequences of the economy crashing, and a sense of being overwhelmed are widespread.
- Many with chronic mental health issues are struggling more than usual having lost their individual coping mechanisms – sports, socialising, face-to-face counselling which are routines that force them out of the house and into social interaction.
- Young people are facing a very specific set of issues – missing school, feeling the absence of their friends' support, a sense of hopelessness because of their perceived dearth of educational and career prospects.
- Older people have been particularly isolated because of the greater rates of digital exclusion they face and their often greater need to self-isolate or shield. The moving of many services online has left many feeling overlooked and forgotten.
- The media's coverage of mounting death tolls and non-compliance with the lockdown has been causing many older and more vulnerable people a lot of anxiety.

- The effects of Covid-19 are compounding the effects of poverty which already have an adverse impact on people's mental health. Organisations are beginning to see a new cohort of people who were just about getting by before but whose mental health has deteriorated having suffered financial fallout from Covid-19.
- There's been an increase in the levels of hate crime committed against Asian and Chinese communities as these are "seen" as carriers/sources of the virus.
- There are widespread concerns in the sector about the unknown consequences this crisis will have on babies, toddlers and young families, and the latent crisis which could be emerging there.

How has Covid-19 disrupted the ways your organisation ordinarily supports people's mental health?

- Face-to-face services have been interrupted. Though lockdown's relaxing many service users are anxious about re-engaging physically and organisations are concerned about maintaining adequate hygiene measures and potential liability in the case of Covid-19 transmission.
- Maintaining the same quality of service online is a challenge: building and maintaining relationships is harder, working with groups is less fluid, and has a different feel which some service users struggle with.
- It's become far harder to effectively engage with those who are digitally excluded and to reach out to those who drop off the radar.
- Covid-19 has led to an increase in demand for some services – a result both of the strain that Covid-19 put on people's mental health and the different (and for many, higher) barriers to engagement with online services. This, combined with the need to adapt and the furloughing of some staff has created some capacity issues.
- The redeployment of Health Visitors combined with the pausing of regular face-to-face services has made it more difficult to provide support to pregnant women and young families.
- A change and reduced support for pregnant women and new families. Less able to carry out face to face visits. Health Visitors have been redeployed so less support there. New parents can't access normal services or have support from families, this includes single, first time parents: has severe impact on bonding and mental health.
- Many organisations have struggled to find a way to usefully redeploy their volunteers who volunteer for the good of their mental health.

How have you been adapting to continue to support people's mental health?

- Use of technology and online delivery has become increasingly prevalent.
- Some organisations have used less rigid volunteer recruitment processes to expand their volunteer base to help meet increased demand and to provide extra support for those who are shielding e.g. food/medicine deliveries.
- Organisations have been using phone calls and letters to engage with those who aren't able to access online support.
- Organisations have taken a more holistic approach in response to the crisis – recognising that housing, employment and social welfare concerns all have a significant impact on mental health.
- Some face-to-face group work has resumed: implementing rigorous health checks and hygiene measures, and maintaining fixed "bubbles" of service users and staff to limit the possibility for widespread Covid-19 transmission.
- Many organisations have been supporting staff by dedicating time to daily emotional wellbeing check ins on Zoom.

What do you need to better support people's mental health going forward and to adapt to the new challenges Covid-19 has presented? Who do you need these things from?

- The sector badly needs more long term and more flexible funding with fewer pots focusing on Covid-19 emergency response.
- LCR needs better Wi-Fi and digital infrastructure, with the Combined Authority investing in tackling digital exclusion.
- Infrastructure organisations should be invested in so that they can continue to support the sector in adapting as the situation develops.
- Accessible localities level data on Covid-19 rates needs to be made available so services can be adapted appropriately.
- Sector leaders would benefit from crisis management and leadership training from infrastructure organisations.
- Adverse Childhood Experiences and Mental Health First Aid training should be offered within the community.
- Examples of risk assessments for different activities in different kinds of spaces should be share City Region wide.

Assembly Agenda

Time	Item	
1:00pm	Welcome, housekeeping *Racheal Jones (One Knowsley)*	
1:05pm	Introduction – COVID-19 and mental health *Racheal Jones (One Knowsley)*	
1:15pm	Introduction to the workshops *Keelan Early (Community Action Wirral)*	
1:20pm	*Workshop A:* *COVID-19's impact on organisations*	*Workshop B:* *Supporting service users through COVID-19*
2:05pm	Workshop Feedback	
2:45pm	Opportunity for additional comments	
2:55pm	Plenary Racheal Jones (One Knowsley)	
3:00pm	**Close**	

1. ADDvancedSolutions
2. Age UK Wirral
3. Award Solutions
4. Centre 63
5. Chinese Wellbeing
6. Citizens Advice Wirral
7. Community Action Wirral
8. Creative Youth Development / Wirral Youth Matters
9. Crisis
10. Everton in the Community (EitC)
11. ForHousing
12. Halton Borough Council
13. Home-Start Knowsley
14. Imagine Independence
15. Irish Community Care
16. JourneyMEN CIC Wirral
17. Kindfulness Coffee Club
18. Knowsley CCG
19. Knowsley Youth Mutual/VIBE
20. Koala North West
21. LFC Foundation
22. Liverpool CCG
23. Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
24. Mencap Liverpool & Sefton
25. Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service
26. Merseyside Sport
27. Merseyside Youth Association
28. Newfield School
29. NHS Halton CCG
30. Nightstop Communities Northwest CIC
31. Nugent Care
32. ODC (Open Door Centre)
33. One Knowsley
34. Power in Partnership Ltd (PIP)
35. Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Centre
36. Samaritans Liverpool and Merseyside
37. Sefton CVS
38. South Liverpool Homes
39. St Bede with St Clement Church
40. St Helen's Chamber
41. St Helens Council
42. The Martin Gallier Project
43. The Orrell Trust
44. The Rotunda
45. Torus Foundation
46. Venus Working Creatively with Young Women
47. Voluntary Sector North West
48. WEB Merseyside
49. Wellbeing Enterprises CIC
50. Wirral Older People's Parliament
51. Youth Fed
52. Young Person's Advisory Service (YPAS)