



Personal Outcomes Stories during COVID: Learning from practice

Your role and organisation: Maggie Farrell, Community Engagement Worker, Children First

How have you been able to keep a focus on what matters to people during COVID?



My way of working with families in East Renfrewshire has changed significantly since lockdown. We moved very quickly at the end of March to focusing on practical support including delivery of food parcels and wellbeing boxes to families who were struggling. Doorstep conversations are now part of my working week and in some ways, they have helped me get to know families better, and conversations have turned to what really matters in the here and now.

What have you had to do differently and what made this possible?

In one family, the mother who is a single parent, confided in me early on that she was very anxious about her son's birthday and making sure that she had a good celebration during lockdown. I've found I got to know this woman better through our doorstep conversations and she has shared information about financial worries, fuel poverty, family feuds and unresolved loss. I also found out that she loves cleaning, baking and drawing. She used to win prizes for athletics and loves her nephews and nieces to bits.

Using her flair for drawing and baking over the past weeks, we helped her plan a birthday to remember for her son. The plan involved cakes made at home and hand drawn pictures by way of decoration. While doing that, we were also working with her allocated worker to unravel the knot of financial and relationship worries.

The day of the birthday party, I turned up to drop off a card and gift for the son. However, the mother was seriously upset as an older and violent relative who she usually has no contact with, had turned up unannounced to drop off a card for her son. The shock of this appearance had left the woman feeling panicked.

There and then, we both focused on her breathing and sat together on the ground with our eyes shut, thinking about some of the positive things she had shared over recent weeks. While I'm not sure I would have had the confidence to do that with her before lockdown, I felt what I was doing was a good fit with our organisation's emphasis on compassionate connection.

What have you noticed that has been better? (for people using the service/staff/the organisation)

I think that things have been stripped back under lockdown. People are more isolated and less able to access services than before. While this presents huge challenges it also means that we have to be ready and willing to connect with people, instead of thinking about who to refer people on to.

How did this make you feel?

I feel a bit more confident about my own skills and resources. I still know the limits of my role and when is the time to seek outside professional help. But being there for people and just listening, acknowledging and valuing them seems more important than ever.

What have you learned through this?

I'm in no doubt that on that day, that parent wasn't thinking about what was in her foodbank parcel. From what she has shared of her history this is a woman who has experienced little compassion in her life. She really wants to make sure that her son has a different story to tell.

Every interaction and conversation potentially has more impact in these circumstances, and it's important now and always to connect in ways that make a difference to people.

Anything else you want to tell us?

Every conversation counts

This was always true but lockdown puts a spotlight on that for all of us