



## Personal Outcomes Stories during COVID: Learning from practice

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The Coalition is a membership organisation of carers and carer support organisations in Scotland.

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



We have used various communication channels to ensure we are aware of the impacts of Covid-19 on both carers and carer support organisations at this time. This has included

- Surveys and research undertaken by both ourselves and other members of the National Carer Organisations
- Social media channels, including polling and twitter chats
- A WhatsApp group for Carers Centre Managers

- Online meetings and forums, including a centre managers network, forum for carer representatives on IJBs, our member meetings, BME Carer Workers network and Rural Carers Working Group. All of these forums have included discussion groups to enable participants to highlight issues and share practice during this time

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

- Our Managers' WhatsApp group was a new development and has allowed us to respond quickly in relation to both disseminating and gathering information
- We have provided a weekly update to members bringing together key information, whereas previously this used to be less regular and more sporadic
- Our meetings have been online, shorter and more regular
- We have had a weekly meeting with the Carers Policy Branch at the Scottish Government to both support the flow of information, highlight emerging issues and the development of measures to support carers
- We have also joined several SG working groups overseeing or advising on aspects service delivery and supporting the workforce at this time.

### What have you noticed that has been better?

Carers centre staff really appreciate the WhatsApp group. Not just for the information we post, but because it allows them to exchange practice and emerging policies with each other. We also have a Dropbox folder to store documents and for peer support

Carers, on the whole, prefer simple messaging online, such as infographics. Larger reports and documents tend not to be read

Our first online member meeting had a much greater response than our traditional face-to-face meeting. The meeting was at capacity very quickly and we had fewer drop-outs on the day. Also, some carers who would not normally be able to attend due to caring responsibilities and difficulties with travelling were able to participate.

Feedback from meetings shows that people miss physical meetings, but the convenience of meeting online sometimes overrides this. In the future we will aim to have a mix of both.

The biggest difference we have noticed is in the accessibility of government, the lack of bureaucracy and the pace of new developments. When we have suggested measures to support carers and carer support organisations we have been listened to and many of our suggestions have been implemented swiftly. For example, a half million pound fund was quickly established to support the costs of local carers centres transferring services to home working and online support. It took approximately 6 weeks for guidance to be produced, applications to be received and processed by SCVO and the funds to be distributed.

This period has shown us how quickly actions can be taken to support people when bureaucracy is put to one side and resources are made available. It has also confirmed how resourceful, flexible and adaptable the third sector is. Far more so than statutory services who have been slower to respond to people's needs and new ways of working.

#### **How did this make you feel?**

Valued and listened to. I believe we have been treated as expert partners at this time, more than at any other time

Also, under greater pressure than usual due to the high volume of information that has required our attention and the desire to get things right and ensure we provide the right information to the right people at the right time, without overwhelming them.

On a similar vein, we have felt a great sense of responsibility to ensure we are actively listening to carers and understand what issues are important to them at this time and are promoting the right solutions to support them.

#### **What have you learned through this?**

- Online working is in many ways more efficient, but we can lose something by not having meetings in person. Both types of meeting have their place

- Policy does not need to move at such a slow pace, as this period proves. We would benefit from more time to consult and engage with people about developments that affect them, but very often it feels like the pace of change is deliberately slow and has more to do with reluctance to change and the availability of resources
- The third sector needs to have more direct access to resources and more autonomy. They can support HSCPs and local authorities in the delivery of services, but when they have access to their own resources with fewer constraints, they can deliver so much more. I believe the Resilience Fund will evidence this
- Digital inclusion is vitally important. Older people in particular without online access have been less able to participate in communities and more isolated as a result.

### **Anything else you want to tell us?**

We have all been processing what feels like a daily avalanche of information. This is not surprising as Covid-19 affects every area of life and happened so suddenly, there was no time to plan the micro-detail needed in advance

As a result there have been daily updates and advice directed at different groups of people. For example, guidance if you are shielded, a disabled person, a carer, a worker or employer, a parent to name just a few.

This information tends to be developed in silos which is not how people live their lives. For example, you may be a carer of a shielded person and following guidance for these circumstances, but in addition, you may also be employed and having to follow directions from your employer. At times this advice can seem conflicting.

Overall we have had to be very responsive to the information flow from government and other sources, which at times has been relentless. Our aim is to provide our members and wider carer communities with the information most relevant to them in an easily digestible format. For example, by using infographics on social media and producing FAQs and briefing papers. Or simply posting key messages on WhatsApp.

This is not a criticism of government, as they are doing their best to ensure clear, consistent messaging. It is a reflection of the very complex, changing situation we find ourselves in.

On a positive side I think it has taught us how to be better, more concise communicators and has opened up new channels and methods to engage and inform people.