



Personal Outcomes Stories during COVID: Learning from practice

Your role and organisation: Julie Gardner, Coach and Trainer, The Thistle Foundation

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



The current crisis has meant that it is more important than ever to focus on what matters to people, so that we can make sure that the support we offer is making the difference needed in people's lives. So teams across the organisation have been asking what really matters and how do we support people accordingly. This has included making sure people are able to access the technology needed to keep in touch with family and friends, teams self-isolating with the person they support to keep them safe and well, and Health and Wellbeing practitioners offering telephone support as face to face is no longer possible. We've also been sensitive to and aware that what matters most to people may have changed due to COVID. In our engagement with our community, we've explored how people are feeling. An example of this is how we're using social media to try to help people re-connect with each other and their peer networks.

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

There has been a need to act quickly and in response to what the people we support, and teams are telling us. This has meant we have:

- Met more frequently, using MS Teams, as strategic leads to hear what the current issues are and plan a response eg. recruiting volunteers drivers so that staff didn't have to use public transport, planning around PPE.
- Encouraged teams to be thinking about how they can support people to live their best lives given their current restrictions, being creative and innovative.
- Been focused on communication throughout the organisation. Our CEO, Mark Hoolahan sends out regular updates to teams (2-3 times weekly). These not only inform staff of what is happening but capture and feed back stories of people's lives and the difference teams are making. This has been important in keeping us all connected and appreciated, during what can be a very isolating time. Mark has also directly communicated with people we support, people who normally use the Hub, and volunteers to help people stay connected.
- Been redesigning our training so that we can continue to provide sessions virtually. Again people have really welcomed the opportunity to keep developing their practice and also spend time together.

- Used technology to be able to reach people – delivering remote lifestyle management courses, consultations and mindfulness, for example. Availability, development, widespread accessibility and low entry cost of new technologies has made this possible.
- Been using PPE for the first time when supporting people. This could have been an unpleasant and upsetting experience for the people we support. Our teams handled this situation through consultation, story-telling, discussion and by showing sensitivity.

What made this possible has been an absolute commitment to continuing to work to our values:

- Focusing on what matters
- Focusing on people’s strengths, skills, creativity and contribution
- Making sure that people are supported and are shown appreciation
- Making time for reflection and learning
- Capturing stories so that we can share and learn from them
- Having a commitment to communicating as openly as possible even when we didn’t have all the answers

What have you noticed that has been better?

Due to the ever changing situation we have had to focus on what really matters, and let go of some of the things that aren’t as important at the moment. This has really sharpened our decision making. This in turn has meant we are responding faster and creating a more effective feedback loop throughout the organisation.

For the people we support we have noticed that people are taking the chance to have a bit more time and space, as many of the things they would normally do are not happening. This has resulted in people trying new ways of keeping healthy, and keeping connected.

How did this make you feel?

I have felt really proud to be part of an organisation that is so focused on what matters to people. My colleagues have consistently shown great commitment, humanity and creativity in the way that they have supported people, and redesigned support around this changing situation.

It is very important to me to be able to live my values through the work that I do, and so while this has been and continues to be very challenging there has been a lot of powerful learning.

What have you learned through this?

That during such unprecedented times it is even more important to be clear on your purpose and live your values. That’s what keeps you anchored and able to steer a course through the complexity of it all.