



## Personal Outcomes Stories during COVID: Learning from practice

**Your role and organisation: Don Williamson, Chief Executive, Shared Care Scotland**

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



We moved our networks to online platforms to maintain 2-way communications with our different network groups. This has worked very well. We use Facebook Workplace to support peer-to-peer sharing of experience/learning with a Workplace channel for each network. This is secure and ad-free. It has Q&A features and a polling function to encourage interactivity. We use the latter to prioritise agenda items for Zoom sessions. We use Zoom to then bring people together to find out how things are going, what support would be helpful, and generally keep people informed and connected. Our networks are comprised of mainly 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations and their staff.

Internally, we use MS Teams to stay in touch. The chat channel replaces the normal office conversations but avoids us reverting to emails to speak to each other! It's also much easier to keep track of these conversations. We also use the MS Teams video for 1:1 catch-ups and we can also collaborate on documents in real-time & simultaneously. Morning Zoom 'team cuddles' have also been really important for keeping us together. Monday Zoom sessions are more business focused but on other days we generally just have 10mins or so of chat before getting on with our working day. These sessions have been so important to maintaining morale and the team bond. As a manager I can also pick up any signs of fatigue etc that I can then respond to.

Regarding short breaks and respite care, we know that most support services have been suspended - or moved online - including access to vital day and overnight respite breaks. At Shared Care Scotland we moved quickly to build a directory of online activities ranging from online courses, games and exercises, to virtual museum tours and music tuition – over 100 different activities that we hoped would help carers to look after their own health and well-being by taking some time-out from their caring routines.

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

Generally speaking, our move to online and remote working has been straightforward. Face-to-face events etc have been replaced by Zoom sessions and these seem to have been well received, and our Workplace groups are proving a valuable channel for day-to-day exchanges. Fortunately, we had the systems that makes this possible. However, it's true to say that we hadn't fully appreciated the potential of this technology and it has taken a pandemic to force us to adapt and learn quickly!

We have worked with our 3<sup>rd</sup> sector Short Breaks Fund projects to enable them to modify their service delivery to ensure that some form of ongoing support could be delivered to both carers and cared-for people. We have seen group games sessions via Zoom, home-delivered craft packs, telephone-based befriending, online book clubs and coffee mornings, garden activities, and many other examples.

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

As above, the situation has forced us to adapt and make use of the technology. In many ways the online networks are more accessible and we can engage with a wider group of people, who may not have been able to attend our events. I doubt we'll go back but instead aim for a balance of face-to-face and online events. We are much more confident about the technology and staff are excited about taking this forward.

Covid-19 has given us a unique opportunity to demonstrate our organisational/team 'values.' Trust in the organisation and between staff has been key as we moved to remote working. We reassured staff at the very beginning that we would support them while they adjusted their working day and flex around other family responsibilities. This hopefully helped allay any anxieties and helped people find their own work/life rhythm.

We have also been proactive in connecting with our different stakeholders to find out how we can best support their efforts to keep going. Again, working proactively has further strengthened our reputation and relationships.

**How did this make you feel?**

Useful - that the work we're doing is helping at this very challenging time.  
Proud of how the staff team have adapted and overcome their anxiety/concerns to ensure continuity of our services and support.

**What have you learned through this?**

That we are agile enough to be able to adapt quickly to circumstances. That we need to further develop our cloud-based capability so that we can be more efficient as a team. There is still a lot to learn from the many creative solutions that have emerged.

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

Covid-19 has resulted in a huge and probably irreversible shift towards more flexible working. Generally, I think this will be positive with employers more confident about net positive benefits. However, both managers and employees will need to learn new skills and approaches to make it effective. We can't assume greater productivity or employee well-being. We also need to get better at measuring outcomes rather than activity, as outcome-based accountability will be key to enabling people to flex how, when and where they work.

For carers we need to remember that online and other remote support are no substitute for spending quality time with others, enjoying short break activities together in all their many forms. I hope it won't be long before we have these opportunities again.