



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

COVID-19

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Reducing Isolation

Working collaboratively to support residents in care homes and supported accommodation to keep in touch with their loved ones during the pandemic.

Context

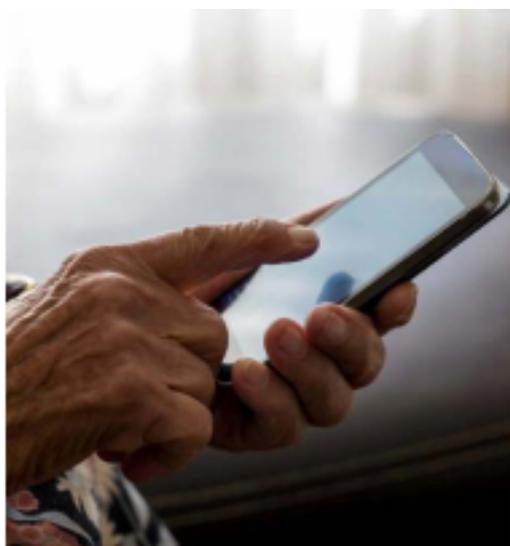
Throughout the pandemic, care homes in Knowsley have worked incredibly hard to control the spread of the virus, putting in extraordinary measures to protect residents, who remain at the highest risk. Of course, this has had a huge impact on staff and management – with issues over rising costs and shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE). But for those living in the homes, lockdown has meant absolutely no face-to-face contact with their loved ones – as visitors to homes were no longer allowed. Both carers and relatives have been rightly concerned about the impact of this enforced separation on the physical and emotional wellbeing of care home residents and that it might lead to increased levels of social isolation and loneliness.

Development

As the lockdown came into effect, people all over the country discovered new ways to use technology to keep in touch. However, in many cases, those living in care homes were much less likely to be able to take advantage of this, not having access to laptops, smartphones or tablets – and many did not feel confident using the technology. Knowsley Council issued an appeal early on in the lockdown, to ask residents and businesses to donate devices to local care homes. As a result Barclays Bank and Sky partnered with the council, offering a generous donation of both devices and virtual training to care home residents and staff. For Barclays, this project was a perfect fit with their Digital Eagles pledge, which has seen them work with at least 500 care homes across the UK this year, including in Knowsley. Sky donated iPads and mobile phones which were used by Knowsley's Supported Living providers and residents who needed more help to keep in touch with their loved ones.

Implementation

As well as implementing all the new procedures that have been put in place to protect residents from the physical health risks of Covid-19 in care homes, the Council made it a priority to innovate when it came to caring for their emotional wellbeing too. Using the collaboration between the Council and businesses including Barclays and Sky, many care homes are now using WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom and other online platforms for virtual visiting and even remote consultations with GPs and other health professionals. Some have also used the Adult Social Care Infection Prevention Control funding (issued to all care homes and domiciliary providers) to set up outdoor seating areas, marquees or summer houses in onsite gardens to enable socially distanced outdoor visits with family members following the visiting guidelines. The Knowsley Better Together principles are focused on promoting community leadership, co-production with the community, partnership working, social value, early intervention and prevention, independence and exploring the best way of delivering services. They very much mirror the values and principles promoted by the Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network – and this case has shown powerfully just how much of a difference this approach can make to people's lives.



An appeal saw devices and virtual training donated to care home residents and staff

Review

With visitors still not permitted inside care homes, the introduction of technology and innovation has been a lifeline for residents and their loved ones. Feedback states that the donated devices and training have made a significant difference to the wellbeing of residents, who feel much less isolated and disconnected from their wider family. As the homes continue to shield their residents, the ability for residents to access virtual GP appointments is also cited by many as a major advantage, which has improved quality of life for residents and helped with service delivery. The co-operative values and principles which underpinned this response continue to be reflected by the people and organisations involved. The relationships built between care providers, the Council and businesses will be maintained, as there is a lasting desire and enthusiasm to continue working together positively. This collaboration has demonstrated how resilient the care sector is, having overcome many complex challenges and obstacles. The Council's ability to respond rapidly and flexibly to support providers and ensure key service provision could be maintained, has also been a key lesson from this experience. Residents continue to enjoy the use of technology to keep in touch with their loved ones – and socially distanced outdoor visits are

supported where possible. Due to their success, some of the initiatives will remain in place even when the pandemic has subsided – such as online meetings, and teleconferences with providers. Moving forward, the Council will review and explore new ways of service delivery, pulling together the learning from different sectors to see if these can be adapted and replicated with other providers.

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