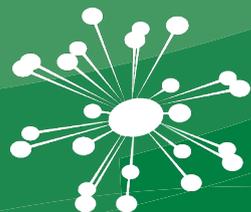


INVOLVE SAFE AND WELL

**SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY DURING CORONAVIRUS
PANDEMIC**



involve

At the beginning of March 2020, the UK was facing a potential lockdown due to Covid 19, with offices closing and services being unable to operate in their usual way.

A new service was designed and implemented quickly and efficiently to respond to the crisis that could be delivered by Link Workers and other Involve staff in a safe way to vulnerable clients across East and West Kent. The service, Safe and Well, offered a welfare call and ongoing telephone support to clients referred by their GP, by a healthcare professional or an external agency. The service also supported self-referrals.

A triage process, promotional campaign and staff training was completed before staff started working from home, and all staff were equipped to continue to support vulnerable people from home. This service was an organisation wide response, delivered by staff from the Social Prescribing, Community Navigation and Community Wellbeing teams.

The service

Safe and Well had two primary functions, to check in on a client and their welfare, connecting them to local services if appropriate; and ongoing telephone befriending. Staff would call patients and complete an initial triage, asking questions about access to food/medication, care needs, and whether they or someone in the house had any symptoms. Using the answers from these questions clients were categorised as red, amber or green, with more intensive and urgent support offered to those most in need. Staff were able to link clients to their local council hubs, independent stores for food deliveries and to volunteer schemes helping to collect food/medication. Once the initial needs were met, clients were offered a daily, weekly or monthly phone call to support their wellbeing or offer emotional support.

The most frequent needs were:

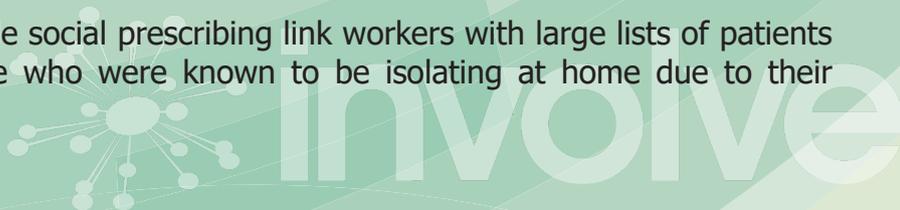
- Shopping – when online slots were unavailable, staff helped clients to order from independent shops, or organised a driver to go and do their shopping for them
- Medication – staff and volunteers collected prescriptions from pharmacies and delivered them to clients
- Advice around housing – numerous clients needed support and advice around housing during the pandemic
- Mental health support – clients were given information about services that were available online or over the phone
- Friendly conversation – many clients just needed to hear a friendly voice and to know that someone cared about them

As well as linking patients to local support, link workers also made use of the NHS responders volunteer scheme. Approximately 25 patients were referred to the scheme, however it was met with mixed response. The scheme had a slow start, with volunteers not immediately starting, but once volunteers were available the service was a good resource, especially for those needing ongoing help with shopping. There was good communication between the volunteers and patients and it became a very vital service. In some areas Link Workers had more success with local volunteers and schemes, finding this a much quicker way of getting support for patients in urgent need.

Referrals

Referrals were accepted from GP surgeries, external agencies and from individuals. A dedicated email was set up and the Community Navigation also triaged referrals over the phone before referring them to the relevant staff member.

GP surgeries were encouraged to provide social prescribing link workers with large lists of patients with known health conditions, or those who were known to be isolating at home due to their vulnerabilities.



Asset Mapping

Involve employ a full time Information Officer who not only administrates and updates our online directory Connect Well West Kent, but who actively maps the community and monitors changes to groups, services and organisations. The Information Officer reaches out to the community to research new and existing offerings and adds their details to a database which is used by all Involve staff, as well as to Connect Well West Kent which can be used by anyone.

During the Covid pandemic the Information Officer had to respond quickly to changes in the community; not only were organisations changing or closing their existing services, but a number of new groups and community services were being created very quickly in response to the crisis. It was very important to update not only what was no longer available, but what new services were becoming available and to promote these to staff so they could connect clients to them.

The Information Officer identified a number of new community groups, with a large proportion of them focussing on practical support such as groups of volunteers collecting prescriptions or delivering shopping. The Information Officer also put together and shared information about local shops and businesses that were offering telephone ordering and delivery to vulnerable people.

During this period, **187** activities/services were added to our database of local community resources:

- 92 telephone and digital services
- 40 different groups providing food delivery- (including business's),
- 55 groups offering community support (including food provision) but also providing prescription runs, shopping collection and dog walking etc

As well as making the information available to Involve staff, the Information Officer shared these resources with the wider community, using the Involve newsletter. The weekly newsletter was adapted to include government information and policy around Covid as well as changes to services, and new groups available. The newsletter was sent out every Friday to a subscriber list of 1421. In addition to the newsletter, information was shared through Networks and Forums. Involve offer quarterly networks and forums throughout the year, however these were moved to a digital format.

The events that ran included:

- Service Provider Network Meeting – 18th May: focusing on partner updates and changes to services since lockdown
- Health, Wellbeing & Disability Network – 18th May, 'Mental Health Awareness' theme, focussed on those who were in isolation
- Children & Young Person's Forum – 19th May, 'Mental Health Awareness' theme, focussed on those who were in isolation
- VCS Focus Group – 21st May, update on voluntary roles since covid-19 and how organisations have been supporting their volunteers and staying in contact

Following the individual meetings, there is now a regular network meeting has been set up as a way of exchanging information across West Kent, to hear from key speakers on a relevant theme and to keep up with the adaptations for support being provided. This 'Covid-19 Network Meeting' is scheduled to meet in June and will focus on 'Staying Active During Isolation'.



What difference did we make?

Number of referrals and number of phone calls was recorded. In addition to this, clients answered ONS questions about their wellbeing which will be recorded again 3 months after they first received the service to see if their wellbeing increases, or anxiety decreases or both.

During the period 18th March – 1st June, **4068** referrals were made to the Safe and Well service from GPs. 973 clients already accessing Involve services were also offered Safe and Well calls. **1397** clients opted to receive regular phone calls, with staff making **10,098** phone calls during this period, excluding initial triage calls to all referrals.

Link workers used a strengths based assessment approach and asked clients ONS Wellbeing questions during their conversations with clients. Though not always suitable to ask, a number of clients did answer these questions and gave insight into how covid has affected wellbeing. Link workers found that:

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?

Average score **4.46/10**

Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

Average score **4.84/10**

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?

Average score **4.19/10**

Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Average score **6.01/10**

38% of clients are in the age group 60-79 and another 30% of clients are aged 80-89. Less than 15% are aged under 54, showing that the ongoing support calls were primarily required by older, isolated members of the community.

“Live savers”

Involve clients have often fed back that they feel the organisation is a life saver, however by making Safe and Well calls, link workers have identified some patients who were in fact in very dangerous condition:

“I called a lady and had a chat with her and she had severe chest pains, pain in her arms and shortness of breath. She refused an ambulance, so I liaised with Old School Surgery and she did eventually agree to go to hospital. Her granddaughter called me to say thank you and let me know that she’s had a massive heart attack, but was ignoring the symptoms because she was worried about going to hospital because of the corona virus.” Involve Link Worker

Case study – Patient in the Weald

I received a referral for a gentleman with depression, COPD and ischaemic heart disease who is incredibly lonely and struggling during the COVID pandemic.

During my first contact with him I remarked on his breathing as it was very laboured, I asked if this was how he normally sounded and he said no, he then went on to say he’d had a low fever for a few days and the other day he fell asleep in his armchair and his neighbour came in to try and wake him up and struggled. I said I was concerned about his health and asked his consent to call his GP surgery. He agreed and I called them and asked for a GP to contact him urgently. They did and as a result he spent the weekend in hospital.

I spoke to him a week later unaware he’d been admitted. He sounded like a different man! his breathing was fine, and he sounded lighter, he said he had no idea just how ill he’d got and thanked me for setting the ball rolling. He said he’s got his enthusiasm back and he had no idea how much his physical health was affecting his mental state. He was so grateful.

Feedback from clients

"Thank you so much for your calls, I really do appreciate what you have done, ringing up to help me sort out my medication deliveries. If it was up to me, I would have let myself run out."

"I would like to pass on my thanks to Sonia as she has been ringing me during this pandemic. I had my lovely husband's funeral in February this year and then Coronavirus stepped in. Had a lot more on my plate in the last 10 weeks or so but Sonia has been there for me and leaves me in a better place. So thanks you all and keep safe."

"This has been really helpful, to have a safe space to talk, I really appreciate it, thank you."

"You've made my Easter weekend thank you, I would have gone hungry without you."

"I'm feeling so much better this week, much more able to cope mentally with this horrible situation, thank you for listening and being there for me."

"Thank you for calling me and seeing how I am each week. It cheers me up as we are stuck in our flat most of the time. Singing me Happy Birthday was lovely as all my birthday plans were cancelled."

"It's incredible that in this time of social distancing and isolation I feel so connected and supported by my local community – thank you."

"Just saying thanks for organising this help, I am so very grateful, I am lost for words. So thank you for all you are doing...its so important for me to say thanks as I am truly grateful."

"Having someone to talk to, just to share how I'm feeling helps so much and I'm so thankful. The weekly call feels like a lifeline and I know that I can call you in between if I need some help and you'll be there and that gives me great peace of mind, thank you."

"Just saying thanks for organising this help, I am so very grateful, I am lost for words. So thank you for all you are doing...its so important for me to say thanks as I am truly grateful."

"Wonderful idea as I wasn't getting any information as I don't have the internet. I am thankful for your service and all your help, thank you for telephoning me."



Feedback from GPs

"One thing I was meaning to email you with and that is a HUGE THANK YOU from our GPs. We discussed your handling of these lists at the GP Partners' meeting on Monday and they had requested that I pass on their thanks."

"Hope you are getting on ok! Just wanted to pass on some thanks from Dr Montgomery she said she has had really good results from Safe and Well referrals and very positive feedback from a couple of patients she reviewed recently. Thank you for all your hard work!"

"Firstly can I just say how superb our Involve Link Worker has been taking on her new role. She is fantastic at her job, motivated, good at communicating with patients and showing that she really cares."

Feedback about our volunteers

"Nigel is such a lovely man and it's so lovely to hear your voice and just know that I've got a link to the outside world."

"Can I say what a lovely person Catherine is, she was so helpful. Such a nice lady, she even did a bit of shopping for me as I was unable to go into the shop – it was so kind of her and I really appreciate everything she did for me"

Moving forward

At the beginning of June all clients who were over 65 continued to receive regular friendly welfare calls from the Community Wellbeing team; in the main these are now provided by trained volunteer who have time to chat. Those who were being supported by a social prescriber were linked to suitable local befriending schemes or transferred to the Community Wellbeing team. The link workers continue to support complex clients and are resuming their social prescribing service to help those patients who are contacting their GP with a non-clinical issue.

NHS guidance recommends that patients recovering from Covid-19 should be supported by existing services in the community, including making best use of VCS organisations and social prescribing to support the patient. Involve will closely follow guidance to ensure that link workers are able to support those being discharged from hospital back into the community.