

Community Business re COVID-19, Mutual Aid Theme – **Supporting staff & volunteer wellbeing** Host – **Jan Mayor, Project 6**

14th April 2020

Caremongering: Supporting staff and volunteer wellbeing

Project 6 is a charity based in Yorkshire <https://project6.org.uk/>. We work with people with complex needs, including some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Only two years ago we merged two charities – one from Sheffield and one from Keighley and building a merged team is very important to us.

Because we work with vulnerable people with complex multiple needs, compassion is central what we do. We firmly believe to be caring, you have to: “put your own oxygen mask on first” and look after your own needs. We use the 5-ways to wellbeing <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-wellbeing/> to structure the support we offer our service users and we use the same approach to support the wellbeing of our staff

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/5-ways-toolkit/Five-Ways-to-Wellbeing-at-Worknew.pdf>

We also have a training arm (Waypoint Training <https://waypoint-training.org.uk/>) who are tasked with keeping up to date in the latest approaches for working with our service users and the train our staff in these approaches and income generate for the charity by selling our training to other organisations.

a. What we are doing

Project 6, like many other third sector organisations rapidly transitioned to new ways of working. We have some staff in both Keighley and Sheffield still running vital front line services such as our Needle Exchange, and supporting families on the edge of care. The rest of our staff are working from home and offering vital support by 1:1 and group sessions via telephone, what’s app and the ubiquitous Zoom.

Waypoint rapidly transitioned to supporting our staff and volunteers wellbeing. We recognised that staff and volunteers would need structure so we supported the organisation to provide this by having daily check-ins on work issues.

We rapidly turned the Compassion Based Living 8-week Course , (which Jan is qualified to teach, into an online programme and offered taster sessions for this course in the first two weeks of Lockdown. The first full course starts Tuesday 7th April.

In the second week of lockdown we started offering daily (week days only, to help with structure) “Caremongering” sessions at 12:30

The idea was to theme these around the 5-Ways to wellbeing. We have half an hour on a theme related to the 5-ways, and invite people to stay on for a chat.

We schedule Mondays and Fridays to be around “notice” and / or be active and always have a guided mindfulness practice on those days. The Compassion Based Living Course runs on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so this means staff who find guided mindfulness / compassion practices useful can access a guided session with colleagues on four days of the week.

Tuesdays and Thursdays we pick a topic from the other 5-ways and Wednesday we have a peer-led slot where people share their own tips for managing wellbeing.

We are now in the process of changing our volunteer training to an online offer, so they can stay connected.

b. What are the opportunities, challenges and impact of the work the responses being undertaken

We have very rapidly evolved our emotion-focussed, trauma informed, compassion based training into an online offer.

Our staff report finding the support helpful.

There is evidence that there is a good business case for supporting staff wellbeing.

The Lancet published a lit review of the effect on wellbeing in previous quarantine situations:

<https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2820%2930460-8>

This paper from the World Economic Forum summarises the Lancet

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/this-is-the-psychological-side-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-that-were-ignoring/>

This article gives a good idea of what the next 18 months might bring:

<https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/recovering-disasters/phases-disaster>

Useful links on supporting wellbeing:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

<https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus-update>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

c. What are the risks, issues and unanswered questions we're still working on

Some staff have not accessed the wellbeing offer and we need to explore what would help them.

Licensed professional counsellor Jennifer Yaeger shared some words of wisdom about our current circumstances and the importance of acknowledging the emotional and psychological toll of it all on Facebook. She wrote:

"I want to acknowledge that living through this pandemic is a trauma.

As a trauma specialist, I think there are a few things that are helpful to know:

- Parts of our brain have shut down in order for us to survive

- As a result, we are not able to fully process a lot of what is going on around us

- Feeling somewhat numb and out of touch with our emotions is normal, especially if you have lived through trauma before

- Some people are also more apt to feel hypervigilant or anxious, while others become hypoactive or depressed. Neither means anything other than indicating your predisposition to dealing with extreme stress

- In-depth processing of trauma happens years later, when we feel emotionally safe to deal with it

- When in the midst of trauma, just getting by emotionally and functionally is okay. Lowering expectations and being kind to yourself and others is vital."

d. Contact information - jan@waypoint-training.org.uk