



Thurrock and Brentwood

1. Introduction and Background

Thurrock & Brentwood Mind's services have remained open (with the same opening hours) throughout the Coronavirus pandemic, except retail which operated in accordance with Government guidelines. Our services, most of which are worked in partnership with NHS providers and other local organisations include:

- Advocacy- Care Act & Independent Mental Health Advocate (IMHA)
- Carers Service
- Counselling & Groupwork; Bereavement Counselling; Multi Ethnic Counselling Service (MECS)
- Crisis Sanctuary
- Digital Mentoring & Befriending
- IAPT
- Individual Placement & Support-Employment (IPS)
- Inclusion Thurrock Recovery College
- Peer Mentoring & Peer Support
- Positive Pathways-Adults & Youth (For service users to transfer from secondary care to the community as part of the Shared Care Protocol)
- Retail-Work experience
- Supported Housing (15 units)
- Wellbeing Centre

2. Issues and Options

The immediate issue for the organisation was the ICT and not being designed for remote working; very few staff had telephones or laptops, with most staff having not used digital platforms. The goodwill of staff to find solutions to the ICT challenges ensured services could continue. With the support from Commissioners at Thurrock CCG and Thurrock Council, together with successful grant funding applications we were able to provide staff with the equipment required and updated our systems to enable staff to work remotely.

Where required, staff and volunteers received in-house training to use digital platforms and/or how to deliver telephone counselling, if needed. Staff were then able to support service users to set up and use digital platforms. The greatest take up for digital has been with carers.

All service users were offered additional support through wellbeing calls; frequency and duration were individually assessed and ranged from daily to fortnightly. Staff worked flexibly to cover wellbeing calls from projects with higher demands.

People that were on our counselling waiting lists were also informed that we remained open and changes to how services were provided; they were offered additional support through Peer Support, Wellbeing Activities or Wellbeing calls.

3. **Services funded by Thurrock Council**

Day Opportunities - The number of service users accessing the Wellbeing Groups zoom sessions have doubled since lockdown. Service users who would not have attended a face to face group, whether this be due to anxiety about leaving their house and/or meeting new people, have attended regularly. Examples of activities include:

- Armchair yoga: As part of Mind's Mindful Monday, Service Users got involved doing gentle breathing exercises and body movements.
- Art sessions: Two art sessions with Kara at Smiles4all, a council funded art initiative group.
- Two Service Users have taken the opportunity to stay on the Zoom after the sessions have finished, to learn guitar together.
- A socially distanced meet up in September where four service users met with staff in the local park.

Those unable to use digital platforms have continued to receive wellbeing calls, with some transferring to telephone befriending at the end of the 2nd quarter.

Advocacy - The Advocates have undertaken face to face work in specific circumstances e.g. safeguarding concerns, or where telephone or digital is not appropriate/unavailable. Advocacy has been undertaken in rear gardens, through windows in care homes and in client's homes in exceptional circumstances. Our volunteer advocates are supporting the service through volunteering on other days and increasing their hours.

Counselling and Group-work - Referrals almost ceased at the start of lockdown. A considerable number of people on the waiting list were either not able/or did not want counselling via telephone or Zoom. Students on placement were not authorised to undertake telephone counselling and it was not until July that the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP) approved students to undertake telephone counselling provided that the University, Clinical Supervisor and Agency were satisfied of the counsellor's ability. By the end of the 2nd quarter referrals were back to 70 % compared with the same period the previous year, with 35% of referrals experiencing depression, compared with 18% of referrals for the same period last year. By the end of the second quarter, a second review of the waiting list took place where more people opted for telephone counselling. The waiting time is currently 6 weeks.

Through our experience of virtual recruitment and going live on 1st April 2020 with the Crisis Sanctuary, the experience gave us the confidence to seek further funding to meet increasing demands and enquiries. Successful grant applications have enabled us to increase the number of counsellors for the Multi - Ethnic Counselling Service and provide a telephone and Digital Befriending Scheme.

Thurrock Carers Service referrals have come in steadily; the main need for people at the beginning of lockdown was shopping, advice, adaptations to the home and carers assessments.

Carers were provided with 1-1 telephone support to join zoom, providing practise sessions before joining a zoom group. It was a challenge initially; it was described as quite scary for a lot of people, but as more carers joined, we were able to share that experience with others. Now, new carers are supported by existing carers when they join zoom groups. They are enjoying regular activities such as quizzes, new activities that they have suggested and support groups, giving them time for themselves. The carers choose activities for the months ahead. Carers have found the new carers booklet beneficial.

A virtual Carers week programme included a singer, a mindfulness session, quizzes etc. which were successful events.

Teleconference and WhatsApp groups have been set up for all carers, with additional calls to people who cannot access zoom. With consent, counselling clients are assessed by Inclusion Thurrock. Carers that are allocated to our counselling service are then prioritised to prevent carer breakdown.

4. Future Demand

As an organisation we are planning for an increase in referrals of 20-25% and are currently preparing to meet that demand by considering staff working hours, groups and recruitment of volunteers.

Our greatest challenge is likely to be the recruitment of volunteers, with numbers considerably less than pre-COVID-19.

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