



Operational Report to the AGM September 2020 to September 2021

Helpline

We are so pleased to have extended our helpline service for members during 2020. Previously, we were only available between 9am-1pm as and when the office was open. But, with generous support from the National Lottery Awards for All grant, we are now open for calls and advice between 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

We have been fortunate in having 7 helpline volunteers come forward so far and we have set up training for these call handlers with additional support from a bursary from the Helplines Partnership. A virtual support session for call handlers was held on 31st March to review the first month and volunteer feedback has been very positive. Arrangements have been made for a remote call transfer to volunteers' own phones.

We went "live" with the new team on 1st March 2021 and the weekly rota of volunteers for afternoon calls is working well. There is always an experienced member of the team on standby to support volunteers when necessary and to debrief. We can follow up these initial volunteer contacts the next working day. The issues raised in calls to the Helpline can frequently be complex and distressing for families, so a timely and informed response is vital.

In addition to promotion of the new Helpline hours in the Rescare newsletter, social media, and website, we have also designed a new, fresher looking leaflet.

As expected, extended hours calls have not been very frequent. However, the content of the calls has been important and often urgent. We think that by being available for double the original hours has paid off. In March there were 12 substantive calls during the extended hours. Overall, they have now been averaging about 2 a week and so volunteers must be happy to be on standby even if they do not get a call on their shift. However, we are finding these initial calls can require a lot of research and follow up work from our helpline coordinator. We are aware that these problems must be indications of severe problems many more people are facing. We know we must develop strategies and resources to identify others who also need our help.

In June, we were very pleased to be able to recruit an office volunteer with a learning disability who is supported by an employment officer from Pure Innovations. Pure is a local company that is contracted by Stockport Council to support people with learning disabilities and/or Autism into employment. The placement is working well (with appropriate hygiene measures), and the volunteer is contributing three productive hours a week in the office. We hope this experience will help to improve employment chances for the future.

Wider member contact

We have continued to produce our three times a year Newsletter despite the current restrictions, and this has helped publicise our work. In terms of other interaction and support for our members we have had to adapt. Our website has undergone a major transformation, enabling on-line applications for membership and new sections for volunteers and campaigns.

After an initial virtual meeting for potential volunteers held in early September and a discussion at our Annual General Meeting later that month, a series of Zoom forums have been set up to replace the small group face to face meetings originally envisaged to happen in 2020, but impractical because of Covid-19. The forums have been held every other month, are facilitated, lively and increasingly popular. There were 9 participants at the initial meeting, in November 12, in January 18, in March 20 in May and 25 in July.

We believe the expertise of the facilitators and the quality of supporting information is drawing more and more interest. Originally scheduled for an hour, by popular request these have been extended to an hour and a half to allow for more exchange and participation. We have been asked to continue the programme when this initial series finishes in September, and we are looking for suggestions from members for more topics to discuss.

This online activity has enabled us to take the pulse of our membership during this difficult past year and help us to identify issues of general concern. Thank you all for your participation, it is greatly appreciated.

RESCARE Programme of Forums by ZOOM 2020/21

- The topics have all arisen from talking to our members.
- Most of the issues affect the families of people with learning disability in all age groups, and we hope to offer information as well as support and discussion.
- Prior to each session there is an information pack posted on our website
- The forums are facilitated by Rescare and have been lively, interesting, and supportive
- We will send you an email with details of how to join the week before each one.

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| 18/11/2020 | <i>Access to family members during restrictions</i> |
| 20/01/2021 | <i>SEND and transition from school</i> |
| 17/03/2021 | <i>Obesity and choice</i> |
| 9/05/2021 | <i>Medical and Social Care rethinking the model</i> |
| 14/07/2021 | <i>Deputyship the on-going struggle</i> |
| 08/09/2021 | <i>Care Act statute and reality</i> |

What we have learned in 2020

- We have observed the impact of the pandemic on our members and seen how this has exacerbated existing problems people with learning disabilities are facing, whether in residential or supported living
- We realise we have seen just a small proportion of those requiring such help and advice
- We found out that a range of communication channels are necessary to reach our isolated and often elderly family members
- The amount of time and expertise following up initial calls is considerable and needs to be built into our plans
- We need to extend our reach to families who could benefit from our independent advice and support. This will mean further engagement by social media, fundraising and other activities
- We need to develop an extended programme of recruiting volunteers and structured but informal programme of welcome
- We are keen to develop local support groups when it seems safe to do so

We look forward to reporting further on our work at next year's AGM. Many thanks for all the contacts from our members that we have had this year.

James Reid, Information and Communication Officer

Dr Katie Booth, Trustee