

FOCUS 5

#FOCUS5 IS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND AND THE NATIONAL LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND



#FOCUS5



**COMMUNITY
FUND**



European Union
European
Social Fund



Lock down was a real challenge for the nation with so much changing in such a short space of time. Our collective mental health was under considerable strain with heightened anxieties of the advancing virus, increased solitude and mounting financial pressure. The tragic loss of life cannot be understated; this was and is, a cruel pandemic.

At #Focus5 we are committed to our young people and we managed to offer a continuation of our service to them. We work with vulnerable people, who are often enduring their own challenges and it was vital we remained there for them. So, we tweaked our provision to incorporate the “stay at home” rules during lockdown. This meant we had to suspend fact-to-face meetings with our team, partners and most importantly our young people. We have the technology to do this and we utilised Microsoft teams, WhatsApp, text messaging, email and good old-fashioned phone calls. Working exclusively from home was the other big change our team had to manage. The office was well and truly out of bounds.

This document will cover the experiences and opinions of our team and our young people, capturing what practises we will retain and resist in the future.

“I think it is important to note that, whilst we have been able to continue to operate the project and provide a service to our participants, it hasn’t been a ‘like for like’ replacement. There are aspects of all parts of the project, from Key Worker delivery and through management, that work more effectively and efficiently when we are able to see one another.”

“I don’t want our success during lockdown to be confused with an idea that we can become a completely ‘remote working’ project and there be no consequence to this.”

“We need to make sure that we retain the things that work and have these become part of our standard ways of working, but ensure this is mixed with the face to face contact that we know is also needed.”

Nee Bedford - #Focus5 Contract Manager

LOCKDOWN FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Lockdown meant our key workers could not arrange face to face meetings with our young people and as a result, things had to change. So, our key workers started lockdown by reminding our young people that they care about them. This was a particularly worrying time, so our key workers encouraged our young people to talk freely and be critical of unreliable news sources, such as social media. Our young people were told to take a step back from the news at times and to remember the benefits of stress and anxiety management. We also reminded our participants that they could go outside but to ensure they maintained social distancing. Getting outside was critical to helping manage the anxiety of the situation and to ensure our young people did not start locking themselves away.

It was important that our participants did not minimise or avoid their concerns. We urged them to acknowledge their feelings and assured them that it is natural to feel scared about these things.

Now that we are out of lockdown and are cautiously moving back to aspects of a normal service, we asked our young people to reflect on our lockdown provision. We asked them to consider what parts of the traditional #Focus5 service they're looking forward to resuming, what elements of the altered service they would like to keep and what elements they are happy to leave behind.

Here is what they said:

Return to

Our young people are looking forward to resuming face to face meetings. They find that these help with confidence building activities and they find it easier to feel listened to during these. This doesn't mean they didn't enjoy the remote support, but it was clear that the personal touch of face to face meetings were lost during lockdown.

Retain

Zoom is the big thing to keep going forward. Our young people have found it helps build a rapport as they do not have to leave their comfort zone. This is a huge advantage for us as we sometimes provide support for young people who do not feel comfortable leaving their rooms.

Other young people have found that an initial meeting via Zoom can reduce anxiety before a face to face meeting.

Resist

One size does not fit all, so having already mentioned the benefit of Zoom it is important to resist implementing this as a standardised service. Some of our young people did not enjoy meeting in this manner at all. In fact, there have been instances where participants have asked to resume working with us only when face to face meetings can be put back in place. So, while it worked great for some, it hasn't been accessible for others.



QUOTES FROM OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

"IT'S BEEN REALLY HELPFUL; I WOULDN'T HAVE DONE THINGS LIKE EMAIL EMPLOYERS OR HAVE ONLINE INTERVIEWS WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO TALK ABOUT IT WITH YOU FIRST. THE ZOOM CALLS ARE ESPECIALLY HELPFUL AS THEY'RE FACE-FACE. TALKING IS ALWAYS HELPFUL AND BEING ABLE TO TALK THROUGH AND EXPLAIN THINGS FIRST BEFORE HAVING TO DO SOMETHING NEW REALLY HELPS ME." -KATIE

"#Focus5 has been helpful over lockdown as it has given me something to do. I can't think of anything I would change." - Alfie

"It's been really helpful to give me that extra push for motivation, there's nothing I would change and thank you for your help and support" - Freya

"#FOCUS5 HAS HELPED ME TO KEEP TRACK OF THINGS AND GIVEN ME DIRECTION AND GOT ME TO THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE. IF I DIDN'T HAVE YOU CHECKING IN WITH ME EACH WEEK I WOULDN'T HAVE DONE ANYTHING AND I WOULD'VE FORGOTTEN ALL ABOUT COLLEGES." - AFRICA

"It's been good to have #Focus5 over this time, you've still supported me and made sure I was ok." - Andrew

"I think that #Focus5 has been really helpful so far." - Morgan



“FROM A SUSTAINABILITY POINT OF VIEW, LOCKDOWN HAS LED TO US DEVELOPING MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY WAYS OF WORKING AND THE OPTION TO VIDEO CALL/MEET AND SHARE DOCUMENTS ETC IS A REALLY USEFUL ADDITION TO THE MORE ‘NORMAL’ WAYS OF MEETING.

“IT IS CLEAR THAT THIS FORM OF COMMUNICATION HAS NOW BECOME ACCEPTED AND THAT PEOPLE ARE MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE WITH THE PROCESS.”

**LARRY COLE
ASSISTANT CONTRACT MANAGER**

LOCKDOWN FOR OUR KEY WORKERS

Face to face

Lockdown has transformed the key worker experience from 'out in the field' to stuck at home. This remote working has not only lead to a distance from the hub of the office but also created a new barrier when working with our young people.

The project was originally designed to operate with face to face meetings. In fact, for many of our young people just meeting a new face or going out for a coffee would mark a huge step forward in their development. Our key workers could utilise this to get our young people out in their local community, building their confidence and challenging their anxieties.

The nuances of face to face interaction also allows our key workers to pick up on non-verbal cues. It is these cues that allow our key workers to gauge what the young person is up for doing, which makes it easier to tailor their experience.

With all this in mind, our key workers are keen to see a return to the face to face meetings, which they feel is the cornerstone of the #Focus5 experience. A real anxiety of appearing on video calls has meant that some young people did not engage with the project and in some cases, their progress came to a grinding halt.

Out in the field

Going together with in-person meetings is the out in the field aspect of the key workers role. Getting out there means the key worker can set challenges for the young person. This may be something as straightforward as ordering their own drink in a coffee shop. However simple that may seem, activities like this can facilitate a rapid change in the young person's confidence. There is also the autonomy to pick the right place to meet and mixing the locations up. The pair can meet at home, at the park, in a coffee shop or anywhere the key worker feels could benefit the participant's progress.

Other popular outdoor activities include travel training. With travel training, the key workers can help our young people get familiar with using public transport, which they will need to get to work or college. This is impossible to do via the remote working method; the key worker needs to be there to support the young person in that very moment. Talking about this certainly has its place but real progress is only realised through the experience.



LOCKDOWN PRACTISES TO RETAIN

It is truly amazing how flexible #Focus5 has been during the pandemic, adapting to remote working and continuing to support our vulnerable young people. We surveyed our key workers to find what worked well for them during lockdown and what new practices they would like to retain.

Remote working/working offline

It has been widely agreed that working exclusively via Zoom wont work for #Focus5. The project thrives on human interaction; however, parts of the service can be sped up with remote working. Interview techniques, body language lessons, skills and strengths analysis, profile building, CV writing, anxiety worksheets and explanations, practical tasks can all be set online via email or evenly securely via WhatsApp. In many cases this has worked well for our young people and in some instances the rate of progress has exceeded our traditional delivery methods. Furthermore, getting our young people more familiar with digital skills such as emailing will better prepare them for the world of work.

In some cases, our key workers have been able to complete paperwork more efficiently as well.

This includes gathering information for the entry paper work and self-assessment. The details collected can be discussed fully when meeting our young people face to face and in turn leading to an action plan.

More Time

Thanks to reduced travel our key workers have access to more time and can utilise technology to instigate quicker catch-ups with our young people and attend more meetings with other professionals. Key workers have been able to use the additional time to undertake more research and learning. One key worker has completed courses in Domestic Violence, Autism & Employment and Suicide Awareness and looked at different possibilities for training for our young people.

Team Meetings

Ironically, during lockdown the #Focus5 team felt more connected and closer to each other. Thanks to regular Zoom/Teams meetings the team managed to forge a stronger connection. There is an appetite to maintain regular zoom meetings. For example, there could be monthly Zoom meetings and then usual face to face meeting which occurs every three months in the office.



AFTER LOCKDOWN

Goodbye

Looking to a life outside of lockdown our key workers can reflect on what practises they would like to let go. A significant aspect they are keen to say goodbye to is the inflexibility presented by lockdown. Many felt that our service became one-dimensional during the period and are looking forward to offering our young people a range of contact options.

Another big lockdown function our key workers will be happy to remove is the high levels of evidence gathering. In order to be able to demonstrate the remote work they were doing there was a need to screenshot interactions via text, WhatsApp etc as well as recording this on the activity log, and it has been very time consuming. To add to this, the team were reliant on our participants responding via email in place of their signature on paperwork. Email is not a communication mechanism that is regularly used by our young people with some having never sent or received an email before. Whilst this has been a useful skill for our participants to develop, in some cases it has caused delays in getting the young person started on the #Focus5 project.

"Not having to go to the office every day has been lovely. I love the fact that I don't have to spend an hour and a half in my car each day. It is saving the planet, reducing wear and tear on my vehicle, and for my own well-being not being stuck in traffic."

Sandy Coggan - Project Support Officer

Hello

There is a strong desire to utilise technology and our new adaptable working style to become truly person centred. This means tailoring our delivery to suit the needs of each young person we work with. Some people will only ever be comfortable meeting face-face, others are happy to only text and others will Zoom call.

We can change the signing up process by completing the entry paperwork by remote means, during the first in person appointment. This can then be printed out and brought to the next appointment for signing; speeding up the process of getting our young people live on #Focus5.

"We need to continue considering how we can expand our offer via digital means. This won't suit everyone and we need a broad range of approaches and mechanisms to ensure we can reach all those who need and want the project, as well as ensuring staff's skills and abilities are taken in to account."

Nee Bedford – Contract Manager