Moving from crisis to recovery - case study

This case study may be of interest to any third sector organisation who is having to adapt and learn as they go in uncertain times.

In 2020 and 2021 Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) supported sixteen projects affected by the COVID-19 crisis to evaluate and learn about their response to the crisis to evaluate and learn about their response to the crisis. The aim of this support was to strengthen their response and their recovery, by improving what they do or guiding future plans and strategies. This work was supported by the National Lottery Community Fund.

GRACE is a local community group in East Dunbartonshire providing aftercare support and prevention activities to vulnerable adults with mental health issues, addiction, homelessness, social isolation issues or any life trauma.

During the pandemic GRACE adapted to deliver all their activities remotely. They also introduced more support for members, such as wellbeing activities, food donations and digital equipment to stay connected. Robert, CEO of GRACE, tells us more about their experiences of using evidence to make decisions about the future.

Why did we get involved in this peer learning programme?

We came on board because we wanted to make a plan to support our members to safely return and consider whether we need to keep online activities as well as being in the community. We wanted to explore whether we needed different ways of delivering our service. We were keen to find out:

- How do we sustain the services we provide and develop new ones within our capacity?

- Should we do a mixed model of online and community support?

- What outcomes did we achieve for people through the pandemic?

Overall, we have seen a growth in our membership and an increase in referrals. We had a sense that our new activities were popular, but we didn't know why. We were thinking about a mixed model of delivery but were concerned about capacity challenges and didn't want to raise our members' expectations.

What are we learning about our work through this crisis?

1) We need to return to some face-to-face delivery

We used a simple **survey** to ask our members what they would like us to deliver, in what format and why. We have an active membership - 75% of our members responded. Looking at the themes emerging helped us to prioritise which face to face activities to bring back first (such as the focus on health walks and coffee mornings).

We heard **people say** "zoom's had its place but we really need to be face to face".

Levels of engagement shows us that other activities work very well online, such as the screenwriting group and the seated yoga. We are keeping those online for now.

2) and want to!

We **observed** some members of our group take more control during the crisis. Once restrictions started to lift, our members were keen to start meeting in person, to help sustain their mental health. However, the local authority closed all their community venues while they revised their Covid-19 policies. We encouraged members to contact the local authority directly to ask for the community centres to reopen. This was an unplanned outcome from our work but shows us our members feel that this is *their* service and they want to meet in person.

During the pandemic we have trained ten new digital champions and eight new walk leaders from our membership. We **notice** members coming forward more to offer to help.

3) We have more focus on evaluation

Evaluation has always been a bit of a struggle with just one staff member. During the pandemic we **gathered comments** from people when we saw to drop off items at their door. We also used this opportunity to create a **short door-step documentary**. We made better use of our contact with people to gather feedback.

How is this helpful to our organisation?

Plan future service delivery

We have a plan for what we will deliver in person and online. This has been extremely helpful and allayed our fears about not having enough capacity to deliver everything in both formats. By asking our members and listening to them we have a better idea about *why* they want some activities in person and why that is important to them.

Improve evaluation approach

The volunteers and sessional workers are now starting to gather wee bits of feedback at the face-to-face sessions which has helped improve our evaluation (using the casual comments forms). We learnt that we don't have to record everything all the time. Our next steps are do a logic model to set out our new plan and how it helps achieve our outcomes.

Our tips for other organisations

- Look at the resources on ESS website. We found a great way of capturing casual comments and will be using more of the ESS templates. For ages we tried to find ways of collecting this – the templates make it much easier

- Speak to ESS. We found evaluations very scary but after chatting we realised that we could do small amounts of evaluation very well rather than look at big scary multiple page questionnaires

- Try doing a logic model. We found that if we slimline our outcomes it is more manageable and makes more sense when showing it to potential funders and partners

- Realise that evaluation and outcomes are not all about massive reports and data. There are just as many powerful ways of showcasing the impact you make

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Contact details

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