What we learned about supporting families during COVID19

Summary

The **Aberdeen Family Support Collaborative** are a group of organisations who work together as one team to provide support to children and families in Aberdeen. We are:

- **Home-Start Aberdeen**
- **Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA)– Community Childminding**
- **Aberdeen City Council Family Learning Team**
- **Aberdeen City Council Peep team**

We have worked together since 2012 to share learning and improve processes and practices to support **improved outcomes for children and families**. Together we have shared resources to improve practice; developed and improved processes to **reduce the delay in families being offered support**; and we have developed a shared data collection process to provide **'real-time' data** which facilitates **continuous improvement.**

We have recently worked with Scottish Government's **Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC)** to learn from changes made during the COVID19 crisis, and how this can support future service design.

| What we will STOP	Changes we will AMPLIFY
(the emergency response)	• **Remote support options** for families
• Door step deliveries	• **Blended** approach to Peep
• **Daily** social media updates	• **Online training and support** for childminders, volunteers and Peep providers
• **Routine** provision of emergency food parcels	• **Virtual visits** to childminders for families
• **100% of time** being spent **working from home**	• Provision of **evening group work**
	• Use of **outdoor spaces**
What we will REDUCE	**What we will RESTART**
• **Assumption** that **all families** always **require face to face support**.	• Some **face to face contact**
• **Travelling to meetings** if a virtual option is available.	• **One to one work** with families
• The provision of all **training via face to face input**	• **Collaboration with partners** who were not available during lockdown
• Reliance on paper files	• **Volunteer recruitment** and **Student placements**
	• **Home-Start Aberdeen shop** will reopen!

Our experiences so far….

How we responded during the initial phase of the crisis

We had to react quickly to the COVID19 lockdown.

What **stopped**:

- We all stopped **face to face contact with children and families** which meant that we did not visit families within their own homes or offer groups.
- We recorded a drop in referrals for our usual support services and we realigned our work to respond to urgent need.
- Childminding services stopped (some emergency provision was available)
- Home-Start Aberdeen shop had to close.
- Planning for future programmes, including summer sessions, stopped.
- We had to stop our efforts to develop volunteers

Total number of monthly requests for Family Support Services

Median = 31
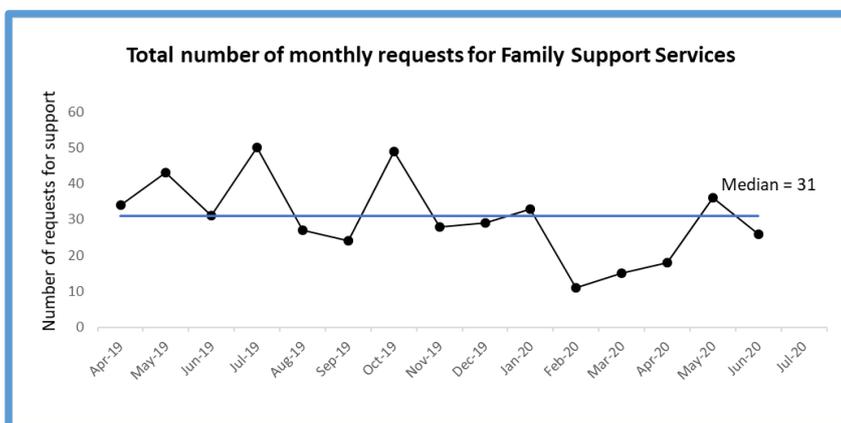
What **started**:

- We all started supporting families with various **emergency** issues such as providing food parcels, registering and using school meal vouchers, getting help for bills, clothing.

- We developed **activity packs** to enable families to play together and support their mental wellbeing. This included use of materials from Play Scotland and activities to encourage outdoor play.

- We also increased the use of contact through **telephone, text and social media** including Facebook, Whats App, and Google Classroom.

- We were able to adapt some learning programmes and groups to provide these online. We had team members **redeployed** to support the crisis response.

- The Family Learning Team started to work with **families with more complex needs** and who have contact with Social Work, where previously our work would have been around early intervention and prevention.

- **Childminders** were included as part of the provision offered to **key workers** and **vulnerable families**, including provision of respite care.

- Teams began **working from home using virtual platforms** such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, FaceTime to keep in touch with each other.

The <u>**challenges**</u> we faced during the <u>**initial phase**</u>

We faced **difficulties with technology.**

- Some of us **did not have sufficient laptops or mobile phones** to enable remote working. Others had old technology which restricted access.

- We had **variation in** the number of staff who had the **skills and confidence** using technology, with some staff finding that challenging.

- We faced challenges in **identifying the best platform** for video communication of all kinds.

- There was **variation in the communication platforms** that organisations were authorised to use.

- There is **variation in the ability to access and share useful online materials** due to organisational restrictions; copyright issues.

- Some volunteers and families were reluctant to communicate via video call

In addition to technical challenges, we had staff members who had to **balance working from home with other commitments**, in particular child-care and home schooling

A significant number of **childminders were closed** and we needed support to ensure appropriate changes were made when we became able to operate again, including the **provision of PPE**.

<u>**Impact**</u> of <u>**changes**</u> made

Home-Start

We have found that, on the whole, the move to **remote support has worked well** Some volunteers and families found it hard to use video contact and needed support to overcome barriers we faced. Once people have confidence to try, they love it and want to continue with it. Where it's clear it won't work, we use other methods to keep in regular contact.

We have also tested **the online provision of some groups**:

Remote Rising Stars group:
- **Good numbers taking part in both family and parent sessions**
- Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive from families
- Parents were obviously pleased to be meeting up and told us how much they had been missing the support they get from group, showing us the true value and impact of this project
- **Parents have the chance to share their lockdown experiences**, both good and bad, and provide support to each other
- **Children love seeing each other** and the staff and volunteers

Cook and Connect

- So far **14 families** have taken part
- We are working with a range of **local suppliers** to source **fresh fruit, vegetables and meat**
- We have already produced a good number of recipes, both written and on video
- We have done 1 **side-by-side video cooking session** and have 2 more planned
- **Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive** from families – they have sent messages and photos about the cooking we've done

Volunteer Peer Support Group

- We currently have **9 volunteers and 2 staff members involved**
- The group is proving to be an **excellent vehicle for testing out new approaches** we think will improve our services eg video communication
- We can share the group's work through our **fortnightly volunteer bulletins**

SCMA Community Childminding

Community Childminders worked alongside other colleagues to provide **Emergency Placements for Key Workers and Vulnerable families.**

Childminders kept in touch with families and provided help where we could, with many making great efforts to meet the needs of the families we worked with.

Childminders have been involved with some **group work over Facebook**, which is a new opportunity. We have also used What's App to support each other and share activities.

Training for new Childminders has been delivered through **Microsoft Teams**.

Aberdeen City Council Family Learning Team

We think that phone call / text service worked well as it has allowed us to increase the number of families we support. The families we work with have various needs, so some need far more support than others and previously all families would have had a home visit. Adaptions made have helped the team to understand that **some families can be supported through weekly phone call** and will make contact their worker when required, if we need additional support.

Partnership working has been excellent and this has enabled the team to work more efficiently and effectively. We sense increased **recognition by other professionals about the contribution we can make to support families.**

Aberdeen City Council Peep Team

We found that **engaging families online has been difficult**. We have noticed as this situation goes on, the families are less inclined to engage with the Facebook page. We believe this may be due to people being tired of screen time, in general.

Engaging with the families where there was pre-existing relationships via video chats has been challenging at times. It has been hard for families who have been referred after the Covid situation to become involved with Peep.

Two members of the Peep team have been **redeployed to support the hubs for vulnerable families**. We have been able to bring elements of their Peep work into the hubs and use the remaining time during the week to support the vulnerable families we worked with before Covid19. Another team member has taken the lead in developing and **creating activity packs for vulnerable families** across the service.

Creating the activity packs and delivering the Peep Pathway remotely are supporting families now and these resources can be used with new families until we are able to deliver traditional groups again. **Collaborating with Peeple** to adapt the 2-Day Peep Learning Together Programme into **online training** has been a good piece of work that is now **being used nationally**.

What we want to keep for the future

We recognise that **face to face work with families is at our core** and we all intend to return to this way of working. In addition to this, we would like to **test continued use of technology and social media** to support our work with families, and internal communication.

Options include:
- Creating and testing private **Facebook groups** for some of **Peep universal groups** (i.e. baby, dance).
- Creating and testing an **online Peep Pathway** group.
- Creating and testing online programme available in other languages.
- Testing use of online platforms/video conferencing for team meetings
- Developing and testing **small group** for parents who are worried about their **mental wellbeing**
- Develop and test a **virtual parent group** delivered in the **evening**