**NHS Lanarkshire – North H&SCP**

**Wishaw Locality Support Service - Making a difference**

The Locality Support Services are part of North Lanarkshire’s social work services. The teams support adults who have a disability or long term conditions to develop or maintain their independence in the community and to work towards outcomes that they have identified.

(picture taken pre covid)

This often means supporting people to access services and facilities in the local community or to contribute through volunteering or employment. An ordinary day for one of the team would be to meet a service user at their home or, if the person can travel independently, at an identified place in the community.

COVID-19 meant that services and facilities could no longer be delivered in the normal way. As a result, they team had to consider what changes they needed to make to support people safely while following Scottish Government guidelines.

Many of the people who use our service live independently and rely on our support with basic living tasks such as shopping and bill paying and perhaps more importantly for their mental well-being for socialising with friends and having a presence in the community.

As they did before COVID-19, staff did everything they could to ensure service users had everything they needed and often went beyond their role, such as phoning people at night to check that they were ok.

**Looking after staff and service users**

A number of staff were anxious about the welfare of their service users and about how they themselves were going to manage in a very different working landscape. The service set up support strategies for staff and service users (social media platforms, shared well-being walks, through the window meet-ups) to protect their mental health. They also developed new systems such as daily contact across the teams to make sure staff stayed connected and could share their thoughts about how the service could continue to be purposeful.

Staff continue to make wellbeing calls to service users and their carers with feedback demonstrating these continue to be greatly valued by service users. Crucially, some of the challenges have led to changes in support which will continue to be valued post COVID-19. Particularly of note is that a number of service users have entered the digital world for the first time.

The team supported a young man who normally has a very structured routine due to his autism. As part of this routine he would go out long walks and attend the gym, which he is currently unable to do. A member of the team brought in his personal Nintendo Wii and ‘designed’ an exercise program, which has made the lockdown bearable and prevented a decline in the young man’s mental health.

Another member of the team supported a young woman who has autism, OCD and an anxiety disorder to set up a Zoom contact with her drama teacher so she can continue to learn her lines for an upcoming drama show. This woman was struggling badly with the changes to her routine and not coping, leading to an increase in unhelpful coping behaviours. However, with help she now has something positive to focus on, stopping things from spiralling out of control for her.”

**Drawing inspiration from nature**

The team also supports a young person with autism who came to the service for support initially because he experienced high anxiety and panic in any social situation. After several months of gentle encouragement he began to feel more comfortable and before the pandemic managed excursions to public places including the cinema and local shops.

Due to COVID-19 ID there was concern that he would retreat again and getting him out of his house where he lives with his sister would become more difficult than ever.

However, because he is able to manage safe distancing one worker persuaded him to spend time with her doing his hour’s outdoor activity. He wanted to go to Pearchy Pond in Wishaw’s Greenhead Moss. The team member has been learning from him how to recognise birds and their song as David is quite the expert.

David and his sister have found their confinement very difficult and they have both benefitted from having even small periods of respite. In fact, his sister has reported that after walking there with support from Dawn a couple of times he has gone out for a walk alone for the very first time. This is a huge experience and success story for not only him, but also the team.

Across the Locality Support Services there is now a sense of confidence that they have managed to change and adapt to the changing situation. They have shared their experiences with colleagues and learned from their successes. They have also developed a Quality Assurance group to ensure wherever service users live in North Lanarkshire they can expect a high standard of support.