

Lessons from Lockdown

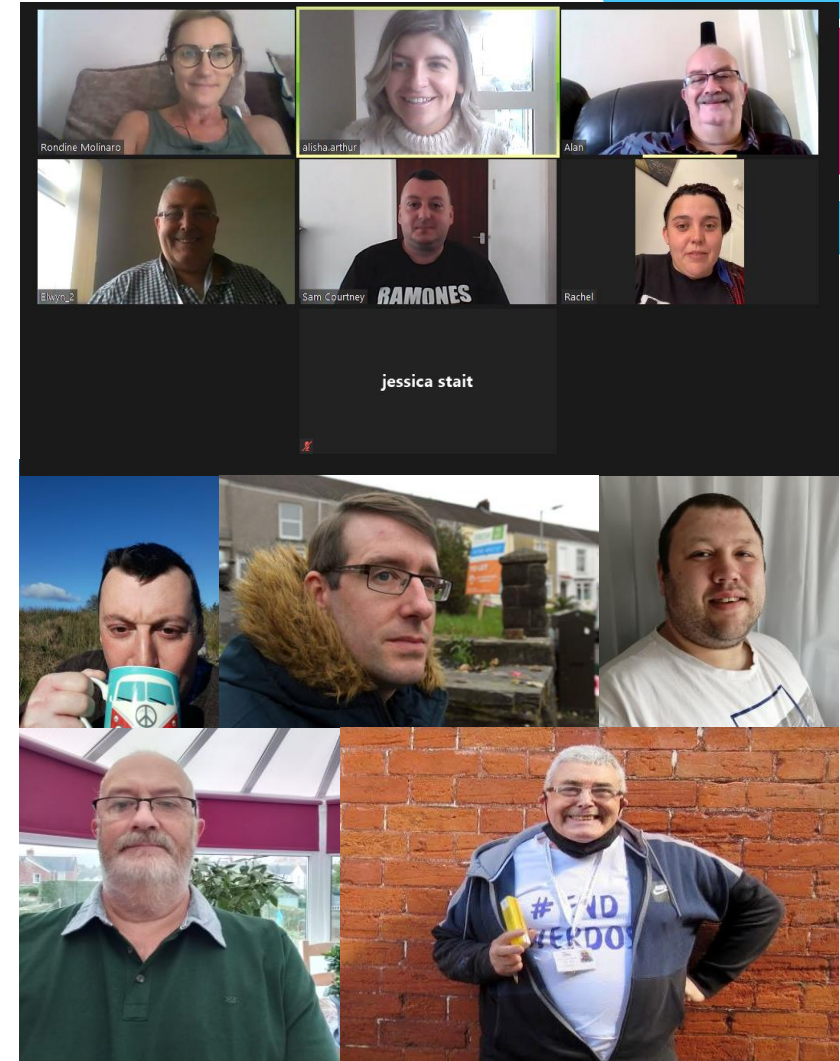
How did COVID19 impact the
people we protect?

Wales-wide, Peer-Led Survey

- 202 service users were surveyed
- We recruited and trained 7 peers across Wales to cover Cwm Taf, Swansea & Western Bay, Dyfed, Powys, Gwent, North Wales and Cardiff
- Our peers carried out phone interviews that lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to over an hour
- The survey went live in July and closed on 31st August

Why Peer-Led?

- Increased transparency
- Created an atmosphere of trust through shared lived experience
- Peers feel valued and the experience contributes to their professional development
- Has created an engaged group of peers across Wales interested in undertaking research projects of this nature long-term.
- Welsh Government's Service user involvement strategy places a duty on providers in Wales to actively involve peers in the design, delivery and review of SM services.



Our service users told us...

Access

- Loss of face-to-face support from keyworker – of the 202 people surveyed, just 8% preferred phone contact
- However, phone contact suited those with mobility issues, acute social anxiety and those having to travel long distances using public transport
- Loss of connection with others through groups/ volunteering (recovery groups, mutual aid, community groups)
- Digital inclusion issue ie. Age, rural location - 60% were either unable to, or chose not to, access online support interventions

"Easier to access - no travelling. It's more anonymous"

"There were more silences, I couldn't see what the keyworker was thinking."

"I looked forward to face-to-face support, I enjoyed getting there and it was a reason to get out of bed."

Mental Health

- 73% of respondents said their mental health had been impacted. Emerging themes included isolation, suicidal ideation and health anxiety
- Diagnosed mental health conditions worsened. Eg, Schizophrenia

"I have ongoing mental health issues, however I couldn't work during lockdown so my alcohol use increased and mental health suffered".

"I found it difficult not seeing my key worker or attending groups. I feel it has impacted on my mental health"

"I wanted to go and end it."

Medication management

- Those on OST reported good medication management in light of increased take-outs
- Felt less inconvenienced and more trusted
- No reported diversion of OST
- Where there were pharmacy closures / difficulties getting a GP appointment there were reported cases of sharing prescribed medication

"Having larger take-out doses made me feel empowered."

"I felt trusted and more determined not to mess up."

"I started smoking cannabis to cut out the alcohol. My urge to drink is lessened by smoking cannabis."

"I've received harm reduction advice on gradual reduction from alcohol, changing strength etc. It was helpful."

Drug and Alcohol consumption

- Varied impact to drug markets, but on the whole service users could procure drugs throughout the pandemic
- No significant or alarming trends were reported, or contributed to an increase in DRD
- 26% of respondents experienced a relapse, this figure jumped to 34% for alcohol users
- 48% of respondents attempted to reduce their alcohol intake during lockdown

Adherence to guidelines / CV19 Anxiety

- 92% followed advice and 93% used PPE and hand sanitizer
- Response to the pandemic differed between cohorts, those entrenched in drug use were less anxious
- Those who received Buprenorphine felt that this lessened their anxiety



Recommendations

- Services should provide, where possible and in line with social distancing, the opportunity for service users to have **face-to-face contact** with key workers.
- Services should consider a **more permanent blended approach of phone, video and face-to-face support**, and offer choice as standard at the point of referral.
- Services should offer **more relaxed take-out medication regimes** on a case by case basis, after all associated risks have been assessed. We believe this has the potential to increase a service user's recovery capital, whilst also decreasing the stigma of attending a community pharmacy and the unnecessary inconveniences it can involve.
- Services must acknowledge the importance of recovery activities that connect people, and **renew the focus on providing continued recovery activities and opportunities for connection** during any further lockdowns to support positive mental health and wellbeing.
- Services should be aware that **online interventions have not always met this need during lockdown**, particularly for those service users who lack the skills and/or resources to access them.

Meet Alan

- My lived experience
- How the interviews felt
- My concerns for service users I spoke with
- What being part of this meant to me

