



Service Delivery Update for COVID-19 Carers Matter Norfolk (Adults Service)

Carers Matter Norfolk delivers Advice Line, 1:1 support, Counselling, Education & Training and Carers Voice to adult carers supporting someone in Norfolk. Much of this support is usually delivered face to face or in group settings which is now not possible due to the tighter social distancing restrictions and the increased vulnerability of service users and/or their families.

The current situation is already causing additional strain on carers and the people they care for, as fear and uncertainty regarding health issues and potential infection become paramount in minds. For many there are additional strains such as closure of schools and support groups; changes to employment (short term lay-offs, redundancy and home working); problems sourcing food and medication due to panic buying, delivery/manufacturing problems and lack of access to services. Carers and people they care for are more likely to become lonely or socially isolated and there is an increased risk of breakdown in the caring situation. Under these pressures, carers and their cared-for will be more vulnerable to abuse, neglect, deprivation and violence. Simultaneously they are likely to be less visible, receiving fewer home visits, social interactions and their usual health & social care support.

The current government tightened policy around social distancing makes delivering support on a 1:1 basis challenging. Increasingly we are going to have to rely on other methods to support carers such as telephone support, video chat, texting and messaging, while looking to more creative ways to support carers such as open space conversation walks.

In response to this we are increasing the amount of carers we contact and the frequency and channels by which we contact them. Carers who already access the different sources of support will be offered regular calls during this difficult time. We are also identifying and contacting carers who look after someone in the 'at risk' groups and those carers who are more 'at risk' themselves.

As the situation becomes clearer and carers themselves identify the support they need, we will add to and develop our services accordingly.

Advice Line

The Advice Line is the main front door to our Carers Services and is still operating normally. The line has been transferred to the Family Carer Advisors who are working from mobile phones at their homes. All calls are being triaged and information/advice/support provided to carers. If a Carer has a need for ongoing support this is still being passed as normal onto Carer Connectors or counselling.

The Advice Line have one worker triaging incoming calls and a different worker making outgoing calls. This will help to manage demand and ensure carers can get through when they need to.

The Referrals Administrator will continue to pick up website referrals, while the Advice Line will pick up NCAN referrals.

One to One Meetings with Carers – Carer Connectors

At this stage, we are avoiding doing home visits unless essential (see below), so for the moment we will be offering telephone support, as well as utilising other forms of communication such as email, text and online. We need to be clear that due to Government Policy we currently cannot offer one to one support in either homes or community venues unless absolutely essential. We are prioritising those who are vulnerable, our existing clients and those who have received support in the past six months, to offer continued support, whilst ensuring we have capacity for new referrals.

Necessary Home Visits

There is a need to prioritise support to the most vulnerable and this will include undertaking necessary visits whilst taking appropriate infection control measures. Visits to drop off food/medication etc can be made via a door step drop by all Connectors. Visits within the home will only be carried out by Carer Connectors who are not in the “vulnerable” group as defined by the Department of Health as a last resort.

Visits to a client’s premises will currently only be able to be carried out under the following circumstances (but may change in the future):

- Caring role is at risk of breakdown;
- Cared for or carer is considered to be at risk or potentially at risk of harm;
- Delivery of food/medication/urgent information or a CMN Tablet;

- Meeting would assist completion of essential forms;
- Both carer and Carer Connector are symptom free and are not self-isolating after being exposed to COVID-19 (drop off's can still take place if carer or family have symptoms or are self isolating).

Contact will be minimised with other persons, meeting will ideally happen in an open air environment, maintaining strict social distancing. Connectors may need to enter the home to check on welfare or observe an environment, especially where there are concerns about welfare. Appropriate PPE will be worn throughout the visit.

If a visit is for the purpose of dropping off food/medication/tablet then this should be safely carried out via a doorstep drop off by Connectors following procedures. All home visits will only take place if sanctioned by line manager first.

If the UK is subject to tighter controls on movement Carer Connectors will have documentation supplied to verify that they are visiting a vulnerable client to deliver care and support.

Community Development and Innovation Project

We are looking to revise the CDIP (Community Development and Innovation Project) plan in light of current circumstances. The CDIP plan was initially to provide tablets to carers and utilise volunteers to train in how to use them. There was not an initial plan to provide internet through the tablets but instead to rely on the clients having broadband in situ. We are looking to revise this plan in light of COVID-19. We are currently trying to source tablets with data sim cards in place as our most vulnerable carers are unlikely to already have broadband in place. Connectors will initially train carers remotely on how to use them, especially to reduce isolation, order medication/food and stay in touch. Carers at most risk of social isolation, or falling into crisis because they are unable to access services/food/medication will be identified as benefitting the most from the loan of the tablet and training. This will only be available to adult carers and the loan will be for an initial period of 12 weeks. We have paused recruitment for the Digital Inclusion Volunteer Co-ordinators and may need to rescope the job roles to meet this changing need.

Connectors will also be mapping the initiatives that are going on in our communities and working with the Better Together Norfolk teams. The additional resources will be added to the Carers Matter website and awareness raised through our social media.

Norfolk & Waveney Carers Voice

The Carers Voice team are currently offering support to carers they are in contact with via telephone. All “in person” meetings are currently cancelled for March and April but the team are working to support carers to video call using Skype and there will be a “dip in” session for carers to familiarise themselves with the system. If necessary there can be support from the CDIP plan to enable carers to access these meetings and ensures their influence continues.

Carers Voice have already sent out a MailChimp newsletter to update carers with service changes and they will continue to do so.

Norfolk & Suffolk Care Support

Currently unable to undertake face to face meetings and attendances at Carers Groups. However the team are proactively contacting groups to offer the opportunity to feedback collecting any carers concerns/queries. The Self-Help Hub is still operational and will be updated as necessary.

Wider Voluntary Sector response

Voluntary Norfolk is working with Norfolk County Council, the health authorities and other voluntary sector partners to recruit additional volunteers to support the COVID-19 response, prioritising the most vulnerable people in our communities. It is possible that these volunteers could provide additional support to carers/cared-for. Details regarding this service are still being worked out, but as soon as I have more info I will let you know.

Conclusion

This is a current service update with some thoughts to look at to support carers and their families more widely through an ever changing landscape. We need to protect this vulnerable group more due to social distancing and isolation which present further barriers to accessing products and services we would take for granted.