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WY-FI COVID-19 Survey of Beneficiaries, Network Members and Staff

WY-FI has been gauging the experience of beneficiaries, Network members and staff in these unprecedented times. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has had consequences for people and has created opportunities to deliver services in new ways. The WY-FI Core Partnership Board wants to understand more about the learning that services and agencies are going to “take away” from the pandemic.

Evidence was collected by WY-FI Navigator Teams and the WY-FI Co-production Team. This summary was collated by Simon Dixon, WY-FI Co-production Lead and Mark Crowe, WY-FI Research and Evaluation Lead 04/06/2020.

What have we learnt so far?

Early evidence suggests that in CV-19 lockdown that there has been a much greater degree of flex by services and a reduction in risk aversion towards clients in general but in housing providers particularly.

It took around three weeks for new systems and support processes to get bedded in. A significant number of the first wave respondents were shielding for 12 weeks on the advice of GP's and this would probably contribute to a feeling of underlying anxiety in the early stages of lockdown.

Telephone appointments and assessments have increased beneficiaries' engagement with services as they don't have to present in person – in part there is reduced stigma as officials don't necessarily know who they are talking to/ make judgements based on appearance. DWP have made things easier with faster payments, no attendance at Job Centres and a reduction in conditionality.

Changes to prescribing in drug and alcohol services have generally been favourable with 7 and 14 day prescriptions being seen as particularly helpful. The importance of continued one-to-one contact has also been highlighted.

Mental health services have been able to contact beneficiaries by phone or in one case make socially distanced home visits. GP's have been supportive in terms of maintaining access to medication.

While phone and internet based interaction has maintained or improved contact with services for many people there is a noticeable minority who report being further marginalised by lack of access to internet/ smartphone/ computers/ wi-fi.

The challenges faced by WY-FI beneficiaries early in their journey have not gone away and it is evident that for some people there may in fact be a hardening of their exclusion in the early stages of the response to CV-19 as everyone (navigators included) are working remotely.

Staff noted that multi-agency working has improved, although this can't be done by calling into a service “to sort something out”. Staff also noted a positive increase in the exchange of information about beneficiaries between agencies.

The most recent surveys indicate that whilst both staff and beneficiaries have been willing and able to adapt to the new ways of working there is also a sense that their resilience to the new challenges is being tested over time. This seems to be a response to a prolonged period of social isolation and lack of face to face contact with support workers, colleagues and peers.

The following pages summarise the evidence collected for each of the three waves of data collection between 14 April 2020 and 29 May 2020.

Wave 1 COVID 19 Questionnaire WY-FI Network/ Beneficiaries

There were 9 telephone interviews conducted on 14.04.20, this was a mixture of beneficiaries and wider network members. There were a further 12 interviews between Navigators and beneficiaries conducted around the same time.

1. During self-isolation/shielding, are you receiving enough support from your local service/s to be able to:

- **Make sure you've got enough food**

One respondent commented on support from the local church with food which would otherwise have been a main concern

One respondent commented on the value of food hampers from the school

I would like more support with food parcels and support with picking up medications

Non-commissioned services have clearly played an enormous role in supporting people with regular food and other necessities.

- **Make sure you've got all your essential medication**

Frequent mentions of the value of support in getting medication delivered or ready for pick-up. Where there wasn't support its lack was keenly felt.

I am getting reminders for regular medical testing from my local hospital

In some places requests for repeat prescriptions has to be done via email – one beneficiary needed a worker to this on her behalf.

Some beneficiaries need to change the pharmacy they collect medication from – this has caused some delays and anxiety. On the other hand some areas have mobile chemists to deliver medication.

Weekly (or fortnightly) pick-ups for medication from substance misuse service are very well received by beneficiaries.

- **Stay in touch with family, friends, support services and networks (peer support/mutual aid)**

Excellent digital communication with recovery groups and support networks moving to online Zoom meetings

One respondent suggested that they were missing face to face contact and communication and were suffering with depression due to loneliness and isolation

One member commented on not being able to access mutual aid meetings.

Some services are clearly struggling to provide a telephone contact service with challenges when beneficiaries try to get through. Likewise if there's no answer workers don't always call back.

- **Keep doing meaningful activities from home (hobbies, fitness, studying/learning etc.)**

WY-FI supporting with art materials, advising on exercise etc.

Pets (dogs and cats) figure in the responses, music and online courses

- **Find advice and guidance from your local support services**

One member was concerned that they felt the risk of relapse was increased whilst isolated.

People's mental health is at risk due to being physically isolated from others.

- **Access your GP and other healthcare services**

Re-organisation of some services at the same time as lockdown caused some significant difficulties in communication between drug services, pharmacies and GP's. This was especially the case if GP's had advised self-isolation at an early stage of the lockdown.

- **Access A&E**

One beneficiary reported accessing A&E for a twisted ankle – no problems

- **Access to prison release and probation support – not applicable to any respondents**



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- **Access to and ongoing provision of emergency accommodation – considering your health, safety and wellbeing.**
Some challenges around trying to move into a new tenancy as most staff are unavailable due to Covid 19
The COVID hub in one district had been really helpful with food parcels and shopping
Emergency accommodation made available to one beneficiary at risk of domestic violence
 - **Support for substance misuse and mental health needs at the same time**
Lack of motivation and fear of extended periods of isolation was highlighted as a concern in terms of risk of relapse but members felt that contingency was in place and that felt they would be able to access telephone support if required.
Interruptions to one dual diagnosis service due to lockdown
- 2. Do you think that improvements could be made to the support you're getting from your local service/s at the moment?**
More support with food parcels and support with picking up medications
"I'm missing groups face to face, trying to get zoom working but can't on phone which is frustrating"
Better communication between services agencies/ services
- 3. Is there anything in particular that you're struggling with at the moment that you'd like your local service/s to help you with?**
"I'm struggling with not seeing people that I usually see. Its dead in town, like a ghost town"
– Huddersfield
"Just struggling with relapsing"
A few people struggle to access Universal Credit on-line and were worried about losing benefits, after support making late claims they didn't lose out.
Feeling isolated and mentally fragile – I need more assistance even though I am taking my regular medication

It is worth noting that there was universal appreciation for work of WY-FI Navigators in connecting (or maintaining connections between) people with services.



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Wave 2 Summary of responses from Navigators and Managers

Mark Crowe WY-FI Research and Evaluation Lead, Humankind 26/05/2020

How services are adapting to COVID-19 from a Navigator Team and locality perspective

Frontline Workers and their managers were asked

From your perspective as a worker, thinking about your whole caseload score each of the following questions from 1 to 4 where:

- 1 is a distinct improvement
- 2 is a minor improvement
- 3 is where things are a bit worse
- 4 things are a lot worse

If there have been critical challenges please describe if/ how these have been resolved

Responses

1) Have transitions from hospital/ prisons to the community been better or worse for beneficiaries since the COVID19 lockdown?

Average score 2.3 (range from 2-3) minor improvement

Example of the main challenges/ improvements

- ✓ There was difficulty initially with getting people out of prison with transport although the prison has been helpful with supplying transport

2) How are beneficiaries coping with the lockdown restrictions if they were rough sleeping or in very insecure accommodation (sofa surfing etc) when the lockdown began?

Average Score – 2 minor improvement

Examples of the main challenges/ improvements

- ✓ There has been more availability in hotels for our clients. Over the phone assessment have been given placement quicker.
- ✓ One of the biggest challenges is getting beneficiaries to grasp the seriousness of the pandemic and the need to follow guidelines regarding sofa surfing etc

3) How effective is housing support for those who are in emergency accommodation?

Average Score -2 (range from 1 – 3) minor improvement

Three examples of the main challenges/ improvements

- The council have some good flexibility regarding housing people in emergency accommodation though there have been issues surrounding anti social behaviour in that accommodation
- The housing support is very good- with people housed and able to stay where they are. a main challenge is the difficulty that all do not get along and it is difficult at times to keep people into the social distancing.



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- ✓ Housing needs service are giving beneficiaries more flex with regards to temporary accommodation and giving more opportunities. Reduction evictions note - appear to be increasing tolerance

4) How well have other services been able to work with beneficiaries? (Consider appointments, treatment for physical health conditions, assessments, and managing prescription).

Average Score: 1.8(range 1-3) minor improvement

Three examples of the main challenges/ improvements

- ✓ Relaxation of supervised consumption of medication,
- ✓ Telephone access to prescriptions (GPs) and appointments (in general)
- Some indicate decreased frequency of contact – potential for missing physical conditions or treatment for these being put on hold

5) How successfully has continuity of support been maintained for people whose situations have changed? (For example: people whose recovery has been affected by relapse, or; those who require more intensive mental health support, or; those arrested, or; can no longer stay in their property).

Average Score: 2 (range 1-3) minor improvement

Three examples of the main challenges/ improvements

- ✓ Rapid support and restart of medication for relapse- good results. Methadone pick ups for 1 – 2 weeks have led to fewer missed pick-ups.
- ✓ Most mental health outreach teams members are working on site- which has helped with clients being seen and supported. including social distance home visiting from Consultant Psychiatrist.
- ✓ We have developed a real positive way of working involving being the lynchpin of support

6) How have social distancing regulations affected Navigators' frequency and quality of contact with beneficiaries?

Average score 2.8 (range from 2-4) a bit worse

Three examples of the main challenges/ improvements

- We have difficulty with getting in to people's homes to sort out issues in them home, hard to get clients to attend appointments because we can't take them in the car
- ✓ Regular contact by phone clients appear to be managing reasonably well and in the most adhering to social distancing when possible
- Even though we have been really positive and creative in our approach to beneficiaries it's hard to support clients that don't answer calls

7) How has the level of risk Navigators are managing since COVID-19 changed?

Average score 2 (range from 2-3) minor improvement

Three examples of the main challenges/ improvements

- Suspect some risks may be unknown i.e. not self-reported although improved risk management co-operation has been noted with other services.



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- ✓ Regular contact with beneficiaries and services has helped manage the risk working well together
- By talking about Covid 19 in all interactions we notice that people's anxiety (based on real or imagined fears) has increased

8) How has support for navigators changed? (For example, from managers and employers, or from the WY-FI Hub).

Average score 1.8 (range 1-3) minor improvement

Three examples of the main challenges/ improvements

- ✓ Daily Check-in with the team, ongoing 1:1 supervision
- ✓ Use of WhatsApp, Teams and Zoom for team meeting
- ✓ Massive input from management to ensure the right documentation is in place

9) How has the frequency or nature of critical (reportable) incidents changed since COVID-19?

Average score 2.2 (range from 2-4) very minor improvement

Two examples of the main challenges/ improvements

- The main difficulty has been around the increase in violence and how this is taken forward in terms of: domestic violence; the general anxieties of lock down and; drug dealings/ violence
- ✓ Increased request for data re staff and clients has been noted

10) How is COVID 19 impacting on Co-production activities in your district?

Average Score 3.4 (range from 3 to 4) between a bit worse and a lot worse

Three examples of the main challenges/ improvements

- ✓ Physical venues for co-production are closed - much work being put into social media and telephone support and also virtual meetings.
- Having to rely on wider service user groups for co-production activities

11) How has collaboration with other agencies been affected? (Consider relationships, data sharing, ease of contact, etc.)

Average score 2.2 (scores 3 and 1) some improvement but district dependent

Three examples of the main challenges/ improvements

- ✓ Acknowledgement of changes and some limitations to service delivery have enable services and individuals to work together for the good of the clients and local community
- ✓ All Services have worked well to support the beneficiary as a whole through phone meetings and virtual meetings.

One of the real challenges are the lack of face to face contact and also the " just popping in to the place/service to get it sorted", for workers there's a re



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Wave 2 Feedback on Covid-19 Questionnaires from WY-FI Network Members and beneficiaries

The questionnaire was circulated to the WY-FI Engagement and Co-production Team and Navigators who talked through the questions with WY-FI Network members and beneficiaries. Network: 5 responses, Beneficiaries: 11 responses. Responses collected 28/04/2020 – 05/05/2020

1. During self-isolation/shielding, are you be able to:

1a Make sure you've got enough food – all Network members had access to food and basic supplies. Beneficiaries using a range of sources for food and supplies – including WY-FI, local food parcels. Sometimes the systems for accessing for food parcels can be a challenge

1b Make sure you've got all your essential medication – there seems to be good access to GP services and other services supporting with medication. Some beneficiaries struggled at first getting into a new routine for obtaining and taking medication.

1c Stay in touch with family, friends, support services and networks (peer support/mutual aid) none of the respondents say that they can't stay in touch, however there are some caveats below.

1d Do you access on-line support? How are you finding this way of meeting for mutual aid and other support – online support gets a mixed response. People who can use it say it really helps but some people prefer phone and WhatsApp groups for contact. Most say that ongoing peer support is really important to them. Smartphone access is far from universal.

2 Network members mentioned having brief lapses - "I had blip at the weekend but I've been abstinent a long time, I don't need support". "Don't want to go to prison, it's hard, started drinking again but got back to reality".

1e Keep doing meaningful activities from home (hobbies, fitness, studying/learning etc.) – what are they? Most Network members commented on the positive benefits of regular exercise such as walks or doing weights. "I'm exercising with daily walks and a 5k in the park and self-care and meditation".

Some beneficiaries report their mental health problems keep them in a low mood and they're unable to exercise or motivate their interests

1f Find advice and guidance from your local support services - It's clear that some beneficiaries would like more proactive contact from services but this does not necessarily mean a lot more work for services. It seems that beneficiaries appreciate a frequent quick "check-in" rather than less frequent "heavy" phone calls. There's some evidence to suggest that phone calls rather than appointments work better as there's less stress attached to a call as opposed to an appointment. A number of beneficiaries point to the support they get from text messages and calls from WY-FI staff.

Some beneficiaries struggle to contact services because of little or no money to pay for phone credit.

1g Access your GP and other healthcare services - Lockdown of GPs surgeries seems to have been "differently" communicated but everyone who needed help got it. Some beneficiaries are being referred to local COV 19 Task Teams

1h Access A&E – none of the respondents have had to attend A&E (despite one commenting that they were "well known at A&E")

1i Access to prison release and probation support – beneficiaries report to probation by phone, where arrangements exist WY-FI also feedback information to probation on individuals' needs and progress

"My partner was arrested and is currently in remand and I'm unable to visit"

1j Access to and ongoing provision of emergency accommodation – considering your health, safety and wellbeing – none of the respondents were in this situation



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1k Support for substance misuse and mental health needs at the same time – beneficiaries report that changes to drugs services mean they have been transferred from a dual diagnosis team to a mainstream service.

At present I have been able to cut down my alcohol intake and feel better for this. I am looking to continue this journey when the COVID-19 is over.

1l How have you managed to resolve any problems that have arisen?

Some Network members found that routine and daily structure were important mental health coping mechanisms in lockdown:

“My mental health wasn’t great, I let the house get a mess, so now I get up at 6am and meditate and exercise then clean flat”

“You need to keep a routine, getting dressed and not having TV on during the day”

Beneficiaries report the importance of contact with support workers and navigators either in person (social distancing permitting) or by phone. “I don’t know how I would have coped without my support worker, he has fed me and helped out so much”

Struggled to stay at home at first but have started to observe the guidelines.

“When the police stopped me to ask me what I was doing but generally I have coped and am coping very well. I spoke with police and they could understand which reassured me, rather than me getting angry with them”

“One of the areas where he has not struggled but really misses is his bus rides which add to his independence. A typical example of this is his message today “it’s a lovely day to go to the seaside but I will continue to self-isolate and look forward to your visit tomorrow”

1m Has anything from your WY-FI support in the past helped in particular?

A number of Network members commented that recent group activities (immediately pre-lockdown) had been helpful in building individual resilience – the pop-up photography group and the drama group were particularly mentioned.

2. Do you think that improvements could be made to the support you’re getting from your local service/s at the moment? Changes in medication, reduction and withdrawal is really hard when isolating– you need to have one to one support to help you through that, not be told that was “something that would have to wait”.

2a Is there anything that services are doing that you would like them to continue when your isolation/ shielding ends? There is a sense that continuing and expanding online support groups could be further developed and carried forward into the “new normal”

“My script is now on 7 days collection and I am doing well with this I would like to continue this rather than daily” – this is quite a common comment

Local mental health services could continue with evening chat via telephone/video call.

“I am enjoying getting out once a day to go to shop to help others.”

“I have quite liked the medication being sent to the pharmacy close to where I live.”

3. Is there anything in particular that you’re struggling with at the moment that you’d like your local service/s to help you with?

Changes in medication, reduction and withdrawal is really hard when isolating– you need to have one to one support to help you through that, not be told that was “something that would have to wait”.



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“It’s good that they’ve reduced peoples pick up for script but not in speaking to a DR or worker to change or get support, I wanted to reduce but had to wait”

People experiencing “schizophrenic beliefs” or “paranoid delusions” have found this condition exacerbated in isolation – partly due to isolation and partly due to the lack of reliable information.

Access to new clothing and ability to wash clothing.

“Getting medication dropped off” (Navigator comments that this can’t be arranged)

4. Is there anything positive you’ve learnt that you want to share (anonymously) whilst in isolation/ shielding?

“WY-FI has been brilliant and have been invaluable in giving me advice and helping me and signposting me where to access things.”

WY-FI as a whole has given me 100% loyalty and has never let me down, the service is welcoming friendly and encouraging. This has propelled me to continue with my recovery.

In the beginning I didn’t take it seriously and then I got too anxious and had to ring the crisis team. I have learned to respect that the rules are there for my own good. I think the time I have spent alone has opened other avenues/hobbies for me these circumstances have made me confident enough to branch out and do new things I haven’t done for over 12 years. I am grateful for every day I am here, and I look at life very differently now. I feel more at peace with myself and more accepting of my situation. Discipline can be a good thing to encourage people to find other ways to deal with things and look at things from different perspectives.

A couple of beneficiaries mention that this has been an opportunity to get financially “back on track”, deal with bills and budget better. Interestingly, the same beneficiaries mention feeling that they’re drinking less.

“I am surprised how well I am coping during Covid -19. Getting out of the property more because I am having to do more for myself.”



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Wave 3 Feedback on COVID 19 Questionnaires from WY-FI Network Members

The third round of telephone interviews were conducted on 22nd May. Eleven members were approached and five responded. Six members approached for a second or third time to participate in the questionnaire either did not respond to telephone messages, said things hadn't changed, or declined to participate.

1. During self-isolation/shielding, are you be able to:

Make sure you've got enough food/ got all your essential medication

Everyone had access to basic supplies and GP services

Stay in touch with family, friends, support services and networks (peer support/mutual aid) - Do you access on-line support? How are you finding this way of meeting for mutual aid and other support?

Most respondents are keeping in touch with friends, family and peers through the internet and phone and would like to see this continue post-lockdown

Keep doing meaningful activities from home (hobbies, fitness, studying/learning etc.) – what are they?

Meditation and running, weights, walking, cycling; doing online courses. One respondent has undertaken online courses and home education but is concerned for peers that don't have the same access to computers or online support.

"I've done a course and chaired a meeting with Leeds Involving People" – Leeds

Find advice and guidance from your local support services

A mixture of responses both positive and less so about mental health and addiction services, support from probation is seen as less accessible/ helpful.

Access your GP and other healthcare services

This seems universally good without any exceptional comments

Access A&E

No comments

Access to prison release and probation support

One person responded that they needed more support, another commented that they felt that services were doing all they could in the circumstances.

Access to and ongoing provision of emergency accommodation – considering your health, safety and wellbeing

No comments

Support for substance misuse and mental health needs at the same time

These seem to have become disconnected from each other. GP's are being a bit more proactive about mental health, drug and alcohol services a bit more reactive to service users who it seems have to chase a bit more.



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How have you managed to resolve any problems that have arisen?

"I've created routine by shopping first thing in morning for everything I need for the day" – Calderdale

One person has needed to consider contact with the DWP regarding benefits and said that they appreciated the offer of support in dealing with the queries arising that could have a negative effect on their income, but for now they are happy to deal with this themselves.

Has anything from your WY-FI support in the past helped in particular?

"A big thing is structure to my day, when I wasn't well, I didn't have structure" - Leeds.

"I've learned to keep a daily routine and to do lists and achieving this has helped massively" – Kirklees

2. Do you think that improvements could be made to the support you're getting from your local service/s at the moment?

Would like to see improved services to support those with children including providing support for ensuring adequate food supplies and regular dinners for those of school age

Is there anything that services are doing that you would like them to continue when your isolation/ shielding ends?

Universally respondents want to see ongoing regular use of Zoom (and similar) to keep in touch with services/ mutual aid/ peer support as well as increasing use of regular (light touch) telephone contact as part of the "new normal"

3. Is there anything in particular that you're struggling with at the moment that you'd like your local service/s to help you with?

No responses

4. Is there anything positive you've learnt that you want to share (anonymously) whilst in isolation/ shielding?

"I've proved that I can actually live like this and I'm doing well". – Calderdale

"Everybody's helped and couldn't do anymore and I'm back in a good place" - Bradford.

"Been doing courses, home education and thinking about what we going to do when out so I'm prepared" – Calderdale



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Wave 4 Feedback on COVID 19 Questions about motivation and risk of relapse from WY-FI Network Members

WY-FI Co-production Team asked a few Network members (with lived experience) how their well-being was now (Mon 29 June 2020) as lockdown is formally being eased. Here are quotes from that exercise.

Leeds

I'm good, treading water till start job hopefully next Monday. Had a drink and relapsed last Saturday but realised it's not worth it and took two days of feeling rubbish to get over it, it no longer has the affect so no point.

Bradford #1

Went into detox before lockdown but drinking again, trying to cut down from whisky to cider, wanting to get back where he was with recovery and start music again when lockdown is over. Be up for a social distance network meeting in the park.

Bradford #2

I'm just hanging on, can't go out I'm vulnerable, been doing a facilitators course though and still clean and would be up for meetings sent by zoom or in the park if I'm not doing anything as quite busy with NA, cannabis groups. I want a job to be honest, want to be in your shoes but can't find anything at moment. What do you mean about motivation, we have a pandemic at moment? It's been relaxed but not doing anything apart from zoom.

Huddersfield

I am glad lockdown is more relaxed, I can see family now, it's my birthday on Saturday and hope to see my sister. I have no thoughts of relapsing although dreading step 4 in NA programme but will keep connected. I'm keeping motivated, been walking and stuff with the Basement and doing Covid training.

Calderdale

Not lost motivation, can't wait to get my old self back and get out and about, I do get anxiety at the moment going out. I'm drinking but cut down loads and relapsed beginning of lock down. Like doing the NECG stuff and would like to do more. I'd be up for a network meeting in the park to do research or topic.

Bradford #3

Lost motivation and on sick leave from work because I relapsed, enjoyed the women's meeting at park with WY-FI, was anxious as not used to seeing people but went well and be up for more meetings. I'm anxious about going back to work too and just reducing on script at moment but will be ok once I get it out of the way.