



Impact Report 2021-22



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Introduction

We welcome another opportunity to share how we have continued to support people with learning disabilities across Dorset, who have been adversely affected by the impact of covid-19, to manage during the second year of the pandemic.

As last year we have been able to use our established position of trust within this community and support beneficiaries in many ways, in particular where needs were less well served by mainstream provision, and to keep individuals safe and well.

As last year, the main areas of need addressed have been social isolation, accessible information, mental health and physical wellbeing, plus opportunities to speak up.



A reminder of what we wanted to do (our funding proposal)

1

To create Action groups so that issues affecting the lives of people with learning disabilities can be addressed at the earliest opportunity.

2

To empower people with learning disabilities to take the lead in addressing their concerns successfully; to develop stronger self-advocacy skills; have a better understanding of their rights; build peer networks so they may more confidently, effectively and independently address the inequalities they experience daily.

3

Enable people with learning disabilities to develop stronger, more productive relationships with key decision makers (i.e. statutory services, housing, health bodies), who will realise the benefits that working together can produce significant improvements for all.

4

Develop an increased awareness and empathy from the community for people with learning disabilities, who will in turn find the community a more inclusive and fairer environment to live in and engage with.

5

For People First Dorset to have a better understanding of how to create cost effective and sustainable solutions for people with learning disabilities, so we can better address the inequalities they experience daily.



What we did in Year Two

2021 – 2022

1. COVID continued.

2. We continued supporting beneficiaries.

The team have continued to talk regularly with beneficiaries (members), actively listening to find out what their needs are at any given time and then responding dynamically, innovatively and swiftly with support as people's needs changed.

We are incredibly grateful for all the funding we have received, which has enabled us to continue supporting members in the different ways they have needed. It has meant that individuals have been able to carry on coping well despite the ongoing difficult situations many have found themselves in, and as regulations and restrictions chopped and changed over the year.

3. Hybrid of activities

Face to face meetings were re-introduced in September 2021 when restrictions were lifted and it was risk assessed safe enough for them to resume in person. These were limited to small groups in well ventilated venues and safety measures were adhered to, such as the wearing of face masks and social distancing.

Unfortunately in December all activities reverted back online due to the increased risk and uncertainty of the Omicron variant, but thankfully this was short lived and face to face activities resumed with additional safety measures in place, in January 2022.

It is notable that online activities have proven extremely popular over the last two years, and particularly beneficial for individuals who have continued to feel uncomfortable meeting up in person or living in rural areas with limited transport options to get to events. In response, we have continued to offer a hybrid of online and face-to-face

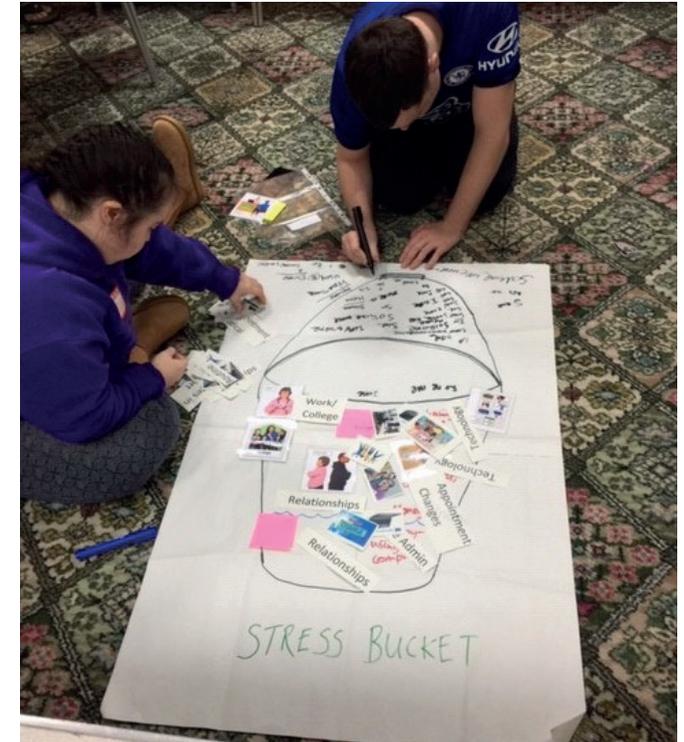
activities to meet this demand and will continue to monitor the needs of members for face-to-face and online support.





The team have also continued making phone calls to members who have needed extra support or at times of added anxiety (i.e. vaccinations); adding regular Facebook updates; and sending out government updates in Easy Read formats via social media or email.

A big positive over the last year is that we have finally been able to resume all our Speaking Up groups. These have been so popular, with beneficiaries keen to meet up and talk about issues affecting them, that we now have 10 groups running to meet the demand. We are also pleased to have been able to start one of the Action Groups with a group of individuals ready to take this next step.



4. We kept producing Connect

Connect, our eye catching and accessible booklet (introduced in year one to support members with information about key COVID updates, health and wellbeing activities and with information about our events) has continued to be produced bi-monthly, posted to over 650 members and circulated by email to a further 500 plus stakeholders.

5. Women's Group and Environment Group

Thanks to the lifting of restrictions we have been able to run a Women's Group in Weymouth and a series of workshops in partnership with Dorset Museum and creative facilitator Sarah Acton, enabling a group of members to gain a better understanding of the environment and climate change.



6. Supporting individuals to independent living

Four members moved out of their family homes into their own new home last year and we have continued to support these individuals as they re-adjust to their new environment.



7. Annual Health Checks

Thanks to the lifting of restrictions we have been able to run a Women's Group in Weymouth and a series of workshops in partnership with Dorset Museum and creative facilitator Sarah Acton, enabling a group of members to gain a better understanding of the environment and climate change.

8. Local Authority Consultations

The team are fully engaged in ensuring the voices of people with learning disabilities are heard and valued in two Dorset wide consultations to improve day services and adult social care services.



9. Other groups, projects and research

We receive many requests to take part in interesting research, projects, panels, workshops etc. Although we are sadly unable to do them all, we are pleased that this year we have been able to get involved with the following:

a) Wellcome Connecting Science – one of our members is part of a new diverse Community Advisory Panel who are exploring how community voices can be better involved in discussions about COVID and the science that underpins society’s response to the pandemic.

b) Manchester Metropolitan University Older People’s Research –one of our colleagues with a learning disability is employed in this research project, which aims to find out how people with learning disabilities can be better supported when they grow older.

c) Southampton University - we are working with Southampton University and other arts based facilitators to carry out a pilot which explores the potential of arts-based activities as a foundation for friendships and self-advocacy work that includes people with profound learning disabilities.

d) University College London STORM – we have continued to work with UCL on their STORM project which seeks to understand how people with learning disabilities can better resist and manage stigma.

e) NHS COVID Recovery Grant - we are part of a project overseen by Learning Disability England and evaluated by the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities which connects networking members to share resources, information and tools already developed in one locality to create a bank of resources available for all self-advocacy groups in their geographical area.



f) Warwick University Medication Support Interventions Research - if this bid is successful, one of our colleagues with a learning disability will be part of the Project Advisory Group of this research which seeks to advance knowledge in helping people with learning disabilities and/or their carers to benefit from medicines they need while minimising unintended effects from these treatments.

g) Digital Support Mencap – a project which supports the digital inclusion of people with a learning disability.

The difference it has made

Feedback and notable outcomes

“I am supporting a lady who is struggling with mental health problems. I took her a copy and it really cheered her up today”

Community Nurse
Dorset Healthcare

“I would just like to say what a great newsletter this is. I don't know anyone at People First Dorset, and have no involvement with you, but would like to pass on my thanks to all involved. I thoroughly enjoyed it”

Support Worker
Dorset Blind Association

1. Case studies – Paul and Kerry

To demonstrate the importance of the work People First Dorset do, we have put together two case studies with our members. These case studies can be found in the appendices of this document (p.22-23).

2. How members have coped

Members have coped incredibly well. They have continued to tell us their greatest needs and we have responded with support accordingly. There has been a particular call from members for activities which support health and wellbeing. Our Speaking Up groups which have been able to resume face to face have seen such demand that we have created an additional two groups in order to meet the needs of members, with 10 groups now running across the county.

3. Connect

Our Connect booklet continues to be circulated bi-monthly with updates on latest government advice, a wellbeing section, members section and details of our activities. Connect is posted to over 650 individuals and circulated to a further 500 stakeholders by email. We are creating a ‘how to produce Connect’ booklet and a template of Connect so that it can be used by other self-advocacy organisations, with whom we are sharing this resource.

“Connect is simply marvellous. I love receiving it and it is so packed full of information and uplifting things. I even send it to a friend in Hertfordshire when I have finished with it, as she has a learning disability and enjoys it too”

People First Dorset Beneficiary

Connect

Issue No. 1 July 2020

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 2 August 2020

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 3 July 2020

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 4 July 2020

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 5 August 2020

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 6 September 2020

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 7 October 2020

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 8 November 2020

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 9 December 2020

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 10 January 2021

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 11 February 2021

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 12 March 2021

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 13

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 14

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 15

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 16

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 17

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

Connect

Issue No. 18

Connecting people with learning disabilities in Dorset

4. Women's Group

This was very popular with all 15 participants who attended. The series of workshops over 8 weeks focused on issues pertinent to women such as breast and cervical screening, relationships, personal safety and body image. All reported that they valued the peer support and they will use what they have learnt during the Women's Groups in their daily life. Three women who had never had a screening said they would now have a smear test.

'I found the relationship session very informative, it helped me to speak up about my issues in my family'.

We are grateful to many other organisations who supported us with running the different workshops, including the Dorset Healthcare Community Learning Disability Teams with whom we will now hold regular meetings going forward, working together to address important issues which come up for women with learning disabilities, ensuring both organisations consult with individuals and address issues through our collective channels most effectively.

There are wider impacts from the group with information being shared further afield, for example a Learning Disability Nurse who attended the session on screenings said 'Our team are now exploring how we can work more pro-actively in the community to give individuals information'.

One participant shared:

'I told my mum what we'd learnt about [what three words app], and she shared it in a meeting with the Crime Commissioner at the Friends Forum'.

5. Environment Group

Through the medium of creativity, art and discussion, 6 workshops were carried out at Dorset Museum where 9 beneficiaries explored the museum and their understanding of the environment and climate change.

Participants learnt about recycling and reusing, avoiding single use plastics, using charity shops, reusing plastic bags as well as what we can do locally to help – cycling to work, beach cleans, litter picking, tree planting. We also made a short film about this project, 'the environment and me' which can be found on our YouTube page.

"It has made me realise I can use art to express myself when words seem too much, I use art to express how I feel outside of the environment project now."

These workshops have successfully started the 'climate change' and environment conversation with a small group of adults with learning disabilities, who otherwise had minimal knowledge in this area. Individuals told us they have enjoyed sharing with their peer group about what they have learnt, and that they are keen to learn and do more.

"The project made me realise how much I didn't think about the environment before, and learn what I can do to help. It has changed the way I live my everyday life. I now recycle more, avoid single-use plastics and I think more about how us humans impact the world."

6. Wellbeing and Exercise sessions

In response to members concerns that without sustained support to do physical activity, they will slip into unhealthy habits again. We have run online Wellbeing sessions over the last year and also introduced weekly physical activity sessions. We also ran a number of Coping with Anxiety workshops and some Healthy Eating workshops.

Members have told us that managing wellbeing, keeping fit and staying healthy is more important than ever, and that they



really look forward to these events as they are fun and interactive. They tell us that the activities and workshops have motivated them to move more, eat better, feel happier and be healthier.

They also say that doing these activities with their friends is important and good, and especially when there are activities each week as that helps with staying motivated. Members also value the support they get to check in with friends on the Activity WhatsApp group in between sessions.

7. Social inclusion

Funding has enabled individuals to maintain friendships and avoid social isolation by providing activities for people to look forward to. Regular activities and special events such as our own, and collaborating with People First Forum to host a second 'Big Night In' online nightclubbing event.

Many members are deepening friendships with the regular zoom calls, getting to know each other in different ways and supporting each other in ways they didn't know they were able to do.

8. Beneficiaries taking the lead

Beneficiaries remain at the core of our work and continue to lead our response to the pandemic, enabling us to support in ways which work best for them.

Through frequent and ongoing conversations via phone calls and zoom sessions, beneficiaries have fundamentally shaped delivery. This communication informs the team how beneficiaries are coping and of immediate concerns, enabling us respond to changing needs and develop our response accordingly – in turn supporting them to cope with activities which meet needs. Our Management Committee of 7 members, who sit alongside our trustees and oversee governance of the charity, have continued to meet monthly, helping to develop and adapt projects as the pandemic continues.

9. Collaboration and networking

Continued collaboration with local organisations such as the Local Authority, CCG and others has enabled us to share concerns, improve outcomes, explore ideas and ensure good services.

More productive relationships with all – online makes joint working quicker and often easier. Can connect quickly – no need to meet in person.

We have continued to link, through Learning Disability England, with many other self-advocacy organisations around the country



to find out how others are managing, plus sharing ideas and best practice.

10. Improved understanding of rights

Members have indicated they have a better understanding of their rights (i.e. rights to vaccine, rights for the right care and support) through the Speaking Up groups and from peer support.

Members are telling us what they need and how they need it, confidently engaging with staff. It is thought the smaller groups have enabled members to develop skills more effectively.

What else did we do?



1. Vaccines

The team supported members to get their vaccines, and we made a video of one of our members sharing her experience of having the vaccine, to encourage others to get vaccinated.

2. Influencing, Values, Communication and Messaging

We worked with the Social Change Agency to better understand our ability to influence, and develop an influencing strategy. A key outcome was to improve our messaging - how do we better explain what we do and the value of self-advocacy for people with learning disabilities. A working group of trustees, SMT and members has been formed to address this.

3. Business Plan

Developed a new 3 year business plan, working closely with trustees, staff and Management Committee. Our priorities for 2021-24 are:

- a) To support our beneficiaries to navigate their way out of COVID and safely re-integrate into their local community.
- b) Grow both individual donations and earned income.
- c) Engage in a targeted programme of team development, both workforce and governance.
- d) Conduct ongoing reviews with beneficiaries to understand how we can continue being as user-led as possible as an

organisation, ensuring members are engaged at every level, and staying responsive to the needs of beneficiaries.

e) Develop a clear understanding and ability to demonstrate impact and to influence, enabling beneficiaries to better address the inequalities they experience.

f) Have better involved people with profound and multiple learning disabilities in projects and the organisation as a whole.



4. Hybrid working environment

Through developing a new working model of running meetings, as well as events both in person and online has meant as an organisation we can be even more effective. Striking the balance is key to ensure we gain the benefits of in person meetings, as well as enjoy the efficiencies that online meetings can bring.

5. Developing long term sustainability of self-advocacy organisations

People First Dorset have been part of a small working group leading a national conversation and research to explore the future of self advocacy organisations, along with Learning Disability England and the Open University.

6. Easy Read

We are continuing to develop our Easy Read services doing regular work for the local authority and others including national organisations such as the House of Lords.

7. Management Committee and Trustees

Both the Management Committee and Trustees have respectively continued to meet monthly online throughout the pandemic, to ensure that they are informed of how individuals are managing and our response, as well as ensuring the charity governance remains strong.

8. Database

Our Operations Manager has completed the new database, which will allow us to better record and monitor outcomes.



What have we learnt?

1

Continually listening to members and their changing needs is imperative in being able to offer effective services and solutions.

2

That continued support has been vital.

3

With the right support members have been resilient.

4

That we can adapt at pace, being flexible and creative as services are amended according to the changing rules and needs of members.

5

By offering a hybrid of activities we can engage with more beneficiaries.

6

That it is possible to work with others to trial solutions for harder to reach people i.e. people with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD).

7

That mental and physical health and wellbeing has become even more important for members, as vital as friendships.

8

Working via a mix of online and in person has helped create new ways of networking and more opportunities for collaboration = better outcomes.

9

That there continues to be inequalities for people with learning disabilities during the pandemic (i.e. not prioritised for vaccines) and that there is still much work to do to ensure equal rights for people with learning disabilities.

10

That people will need a lot of support finding their new 'normal'.

11

That it is very hard for people with learning disabilities to understand key messages, such as government updates or how to stay safe, and that continual and sustained reinforcement and easy read ways of demonstrating such messages are vital.



What next?

Our primary concern going forward is how we support our beneficiaries to adapt to a 'new normal' whatever that might look like, which of course is ever uncertain. For some who have experienced stress and trauma over the last two years, the response that is needed will be quite significant.

Beneficiaries have had very different experiences of the pandemic too. Some are already out and about, keen to 'get back to their new normal'. Support for them to ensure they still stay safe and understand any changes to rules is key. Others have barely left the home over the last two years and are still understandably anxious about doing so, as they have underlying health conditions. Support for them to continue to manage their health and wellbeing, as well as maintaining friendships, is key.

We anticipate continuing to run a hybrid of activities, both in person and online, including some smaller and additional meetings/events, as well as working more intensively with some individuals to build confidence back up.



Support for each individual, whatever their anxieties are at any given time, will be essential for a long time to come. Also important will be opportunities to listen and share experiences so that beneficiaries learn and develop skills to support each other.

The organisation will also be working over the next year as it prepares to apply for a Trusted Charity Mark, carrying out a systematic self-assessment process across 11 quality areas, covering all aspects of operation.

We are incredibly grateful and appreciative of all the funding we have received, without which we would certainly not have been able to respond to the needs of adults with learning disabilities across Dorset as they required.

Our continued conversations with members and their carers tells us that the reason that they have coped, as well as they have, is down to the fact that they have continued to have much interaction and activity from People First Dorset.



Environment
and...

Appendices

We ran 340 Events

Between 1st April 2021 & 31st March 2022

118



86



47

Our Voice

44

Wellness Groups

23



Exercise Sessions

22

Bespoke Workshops
(healthy eating, environment, anxiety and women's group)

128



online sessions
(with an average of 10 people at each)



Case Study: Paul's Story



Paul, in his sixties, lives alone in North Dorset and has a learning disability as well as anxiety. In his own words:

“It was hard COVID, not going out very far. I like going out. The nice people at People First Dorset phoned me and talked to me. It made me happy. I would have got het up and upset otherwise and I don't want that. I am now fine wearing face masks on the buses and supermarket.

I love the Friendship Club and glad we can go again.”



Case Study: Kerry's Story

Kerry took part in the Environment Workshops and found that the medium of art to express what she was learning in the environment workshops so useful and beneficial, that she has incorporated it into her every day life.

With the support of her support worker, she has been using art to express herself about other areas in her life. She says:

“Using art is really useful as trying to understand or talk about such a big topic such as the environment can be overwhelming and hard to get across what you’re thinking, but by using art you can show what you want to say visually which is much better. It is a really useful tool to have.”





What we did April 2021 - March 2022

#an update of what we did in our second year of funding, which we were able to do in person some of the time, when we were allowed and it was safe to do so, but otherwise we continued to do from home.

To find out more, visit our website:

www.peoplefirstdorset.org.uk

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