

Learning Disability News May 2020

Special COVID 19 edition



Southampton Mencap COVID 19 position statement

In line with government advice we are taking precautionary measures in order to protect our service users, staff and volunteers. Our day services, clubs and short break activities are currently closed until we know for certain these can operate safely. We have kept in close contact with our staff teams who have been supporting us from home since the lockdown. The Mencap and CIS offices are open on a part time basis, but are limiting non-essential visitors to the buildings but our phone lines are open for business as usual. Please continue to stay in touch with us either by phone or e mail until business can resume and we would like to thank everyone for their continued support and understanding during this difficult time.

Southampton Mencap CEO (and family carer) blog in light of COVID 19 crisis



As someone with a usual working lifestyle of being out of the house for over almost 12 hours a day at least 4 times a week, I found myself suddenly thrust into a full time caring role with little choice but to stay at home. There has been some positive effect to this; I am enjoying not rushing around to fit into an externally dictated timetable. I have found myself enjoying time spent with my husband and my daughter who has a learning disability without the usual demands of time pressure. I

know I am fortunate as there are two of us to support Fiona and without her usual weekly activities it has fallen completely on both of us to do this 24/7. It has only been possible through my husband's support that I have been able to work from home and am glad we are not facing financial hardship, at least for the time being. We have a garden we all enjoy and Fiona is fairly cooperative. We manage to get her out for a walk most days and she appears to be relishing in her new relaxed lifestyle to the extent that we worry how she and we will cope when life returns to normal. We also know that if any one of these things was different it would be so much harder. We also realise as time quickly creeps by that the opportunities for our recovery by having a break decreases while the effort required in keeping her safe and well occupied increases.

I know from my involvement with Southampton Mencap that many families and those they care for do not have these safeguards to keep them going and we have therefore made sure that our team has been proactive in checking in with those known to us to make sure they are doing ok. We've developed Mencap Activity packs which have been personally delivered to our day service and Fairplay children and young people and the different weekly themes have helped to keep spirits up and give everyone something positive to focus on during the pandemic. These have been packed full of activity ideas as well as tips to keep everyone entertained and we've been astounded at the generosity of members of Southampton Mutual Aid who have donated art and craft materials for these.

(Continued overleaf)

Trustees
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Di Bernstein
Daniel Mar-Molinero
Heidi Oldrey
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Carers in Southampton
Service Manager
Linda Lawless

Day Service & Club
Supervisors
Mary Street
Pula Popat
Marc Kibler
Cath Wigham
Liz Curtis
Sam Pickard

And not forgetting our magnificent bunch of sessional staff and volunteers!

Website:
www.southamptonmencap.org.uk



CEO (and family carer) blog continued...

We've provided a daily Facebook blog to help everyone stay informed and up to date with developments and we're soon embarking on our first Zoom gathering to keep our members and their families engaged. Our Carers in Southampton service is also keeping in touch with over 3000 carers registered on their database.

We know this is a difficult and unusual time for everyone, but we also know many family carers who have been forced to manage with little or no support and we are concerned that they may be left to carry on with things under their own devices or with vastly reduced services when this is over. Together with our Carers service we are working with the council to identify those who are most vulnerable and at risk.

We are aware that some have taken their relatives out of supported living or shared lives arrangements so they can keep them close and safe during the lockdown. The impact of having people at home full time combined with loss of work or the need to turn down work in order to manage caring responsibilities, along with increased energy and food costs has had a profound financial impact for some.

We know there's been a huge response in the City to reach out and offer support to those who need it and we applaud the efforts of the Community Support Hub and development of local neighbourhood schemes. However, we really don't know what's been going on "behind closed doors" for those caring for someone with a learning disability, autism, or challenging behaviours, many who will in some ways have been better prepared than the rest of the country, having already experienced years of social isolation, or living life one day at a time and unable to plan things in advance. This current situation has only added to an already significant emotional burden to those living in a state of heightened anxiety. We've all heard the term "unprecedented times" but wonder what will now be deemed as acceptable under this umbrella? Perhaps all the years we've fought for our loved ones to be considered equal will now vanish? Because of these fears, Southampton Mencap will continue campaigning for improved services and support on behalf of people with a learning disability and their family carers.

When we become more familiar with the 'new normal' we will update on how we intend to ease back into re-opening services and how we can best support everyone but meanwhile we hope everyone is staying safe. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if we can help in anyway.

Alexandra Iles (Southampton Mencap CEO and mum to Fiona)

Southampton Mencap new and improved website coming soon



We are currently redesigning our website to give it a fresh, interactive makeover. All information will remain the same but the site will be brighter, clearer and easier to navigate. It'll also be much easier for us to update more often so we can bring you timely, relevant information when you need it.

Keep an eye out in May/June time for the unveiling!



Good News Blog



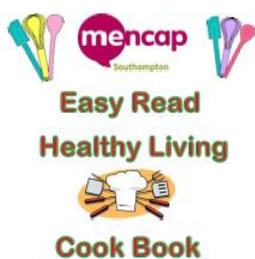
The Good News Blog

We've had some excellent feedback from family carers

"You have no idea how much Nicole needed this uplift today. It's been a difficult time with lots of tears and this kind gesture made the world of difference to her. Thank you so much Mencap – it's nice to see her face light up!"

"Absolutely amazing, thank you for this as it will keep Lewis busy although now he thinks he is going back to Mencap and keeps asking when it will re-open!"

"Very many thanks for Robert's activity pack. Dad has enjoyed sowing the parsley and radish seeds, Mum, with Robert's help, is going to make the drizzle cake and, by the time you see him next, our son will know his colours and will be much improved at writing his name, naming colours and colouring in"



We hope you enjoyed your complimentary copy of the Healthy Living Cookbook which was included with last week's activity resource pack.



Activity Resource Packs

The first of our activity packs went out for delivery over a month ago and have been hand delivered by our staff on a weekly basis to our day service and Fairplay Scheme service members. Apart from being packed full of useful resources to keep people occupied and motivated to create their own personal masterpieces, our members have loved seeing familiar faces again (within social distancing rules!) Thank you also to Southampton COVID 19 Mutual Aid group for generously donating items for the packs. We have restricted these to our day service and Fairplay members, but if you or someone you know would benefit from a pack, please let us know.

The Southampton Mencap team is still here to help with any advice or information, ideas for activities and things to do. We are also keeping in touch with everyone on a regular basis so just let us know if you are experiencing any problems and we will see what we can do to help.

We will soon be embarking on Zoom calls with our members (and their family members who may want to join in and support them) Information on how to join these will be posted on Facebook and sent out by e mail so keep an eye out for this.

We have a small supply of **protective face masks**; these cover the whole face with a soft plastic visor. They are available for anyone who has a need but cannot get hold of one.



SCC Adult Health & Social Care Helpline: 023 8083 4800

In response to the COVID-19 crisis which has impacted every household in some way, Southampton City Council has launched a **Community Support Hub** and a dedicated helpline to ensure that the most vulnerable people across the city have access to the support they need.

Open **Monday to Friday, 8.30am-5pm** and for anyone in a vulnerable group, in critical need and with no other means of support



The Learning Disability Helpline is a free help and advice line run by National Mencap. Advisors can offer you advice and information about learning disability and help you find the right support and services in your area. It is for anyone about anything to do with learning disability. **Get in touch from 9am to 3pm, Monday to Friday** by phoning **0808 808 1111** or emailing helpline@mencap.org.uk. Due to the coronavirus the helpline staff are working from home so there may be a longer waiting time to answer your call.

Inspirational photographs at a time of crisis, creating positivity for the future!

“Usually I am so busy working that I don’t have the time or energy to spend quality time with my two daughters with learning disabilities/difficulties. Since I have been home I have been cooking, gardening, playing games and have had some lovely times with my daughters which is normally so hard to do when I’m working 6 days a week. This time of isolation has made me stop and realise how much I love my little family and when things return to normal I am going to make sure I balance a proper ratio of work and family time as they are and always will be my number one priority. So I guess the inspiration I am hoping to try and get across is let this time of isolation be a time to reflect and make more time for the people you love. This pic is of my daughters Victoria and Rachael, my hubby Marc and me having a lovely family day in our garden after 2 weeks into isolation”. *Love Lizi xx*

Staying at home has helped protect our communities but we know it has been and continues to be tough. We still have the capacity to support more people, if you know of anyone who requires additional help, e.g. shopping, wellbeing calls, picking up prescriptions, please let us know. Don’t let them be isolated at this very difficult time.

Annual Health Checks

NHS bosses say that health checks for people with learning disabilities will restart soon. They have said this needs to be done safely with full attention to infection prevention and control. The Southampton Commissioning team will be working with primary care and health team colleagues on how these can be carried out safely.



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