

Virtual North Belfast LPG Meeting
1st October 2020
10:30am

Attendees:

Katrina Newell	Chair/Ashton Community Trust
Gabi Mornhinweg	BHSCT
Edith McManus	Lower North Belfast FSH
Laura Feeney	Save the Children
Caroline Milligan	Co-Ordinator Glenbrook Sure Start
Steve Morrison	Street Beat
Conor Murphy	EA Youth Service
Alison Templeton	New Life Counselling
Martin Sloane	LPG Co-Ordinator BHSCT
Sadie Reid	NB Housing
Laura Forte	NIACRO
Michael Hogg	EA Youth Service
Elaine Loughran	Mercy Primary School
Annette McCann	Lighthouse Charity
Bronagh O'Dwyer	NOW Group Family Service
Paul O'Neill	BHSCT
Sinead McKinley	North Belfast Advice Partnership (NBAP)
Joe McGovern	Extern
Karen McLean	Upper North FSH

Apologies:

Laura Feeney	Save the Children
Danielle Roberts	Here NI
Nuala McCallum	Flax Foyer
Carriann Rainey	Cedar Foundation
Phil Lindsay	Barnardos
Robyn McNulty	NOW Group
Sinead Campbell	Advice NI
Emma Ross	BHSCT
Cara McCann	Here NI

1. Welcome and Introduction

Martin Sloane began by advising everyone the meeting was being recorded for administration purposes. There were no objections.

Katrina then opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and facilitating a round of introductions.

2. Poverty – Sinead McKinley (NBAP)

Sinead spoke to the group of her experiences with the North Belfast Advice Partnership. She revealed that poverty comes in many different forms; lifelong poverty; the working poor; those on the cusp of poverty; hidden poverty and chaotic lifestyles leading to poverty. At the beginning of the year, the main concern was around the roll out of Universal Credit, however this was overtaken by the outbreak of Covid-19.

The lockdown saw a lot of people stockpiling items that, for low income families, were weekly essentials and they therefore needed to turn to food banks for supplies. Food banks also grew to accommodate people who were shielding as they were unable to get to the shops. In the first 12 weeks, 2000 food parcels were delivered. By the end of June, the demand steadied as people found a new routine. However, during the summer it was observed that people were starting to struggle, especially the working poor - people not on benefits but having their wages cut through furlough. They were just about managing. It was also found that there was a real stigma around using food banks, especially those families who have never been on benefits and always supported themselves. NBAP tried to protect people's dignity by delivering their shopping in Tesco bags so neighbours would not know it was a food bank delivery.

Sinead also stated that refugee families and asylum seekers are still facing language barriers. It is important that we can interpret what they need, not what we think they need.

Q: Katrina Newell - If there is a group here today that isn't aware of, or that wants to access support can you give us a point or two on how to do that? Also, is there anything, as an LPG that we need to be more mindful of? How can we support you?

A: Sinead McKinley – The easiest way to refer is to email Sinead on advice@ligonielvillage.com. The contents of the email need to state; how many are in a household, the ages of any children, if baby items are needed and special dietary requirements. Normally a hamper is delivered the following day but if it is very urgent then it can be delivered that evening.

With regards to being mindful, it is important to be aware of how we talk about money, and the value of money to our children. Children are more physically removed from money nowadays as most transactions are digital, therefore making it difficult for a child to understand the concept of money. Carrying out activities such as saving for a family day out can help children better understand money and how to manage it.

Michael Hogg added that he could identify with NBAP through the Education Authority's Eat Well Live Well scheme. EA identified early that the weekly contact at the door was essential.

It was realised that cooking skills are quite low in a lot of households. The food drops allowed EA staff to identify vulnerability rather than just eligibility, for free school meals. The support went beyond just food, care packages were also delivered and it was found that period poverty was a big issue.

Eat Well Live Well delivered around 5000 packs a week across Northern Ireland. Any shame around using food banks quickly was negated as this was viewed as support.

To help their staff mentally deal with crisis situations, EA approached the University of Ulster and asked them to devise a module to help staff cope with the challenging situations they may find themselves in.

Sadie Reid added that NB Housing were looking at ways to support tenants. Funding has been received to buy slow cookers for 10 tenants who need them. Ingredients will be supplied every week and there will be an online cookery class to follow. They also have funding to loan out some tablets for this purpose.

Sadie also added that if anyone in the group has a client who is a NB tenant, refer them to her and she will offer her help and support.

Elaine Loughran of Mercy P.S. said they were able to quickly identify vulnerable families and work alongside other community partners in giving support.

Last winter was the toughest they had seen and a lot of families were using food banks. Mercy P.S. distributed a book around the topic of not having any money and going to the food bank. It was issued for P1-P7 as food banks are becoming the reality for many families.

It was noted that numerous families would not be surviving without the additional support from the community. The uniform bank was excellent and parents really appreciated it.

Elaine commented that we are facing a difficult few months ahead with furlough ending. She also advised that she is spending a lot of time counselling for signposting so appreciates having so many organisations in the one place at this meeting. Elaine extended her thanks to everyone for their support.

Q Michael Hogg – Regarding the delay in free school meal payments, is the issue linked to the paperwork not being processed or linked to the benefits process, i.e., eligibility is dependent on which benefit you are on?

A- Elaine Loughran – The issue lies in both. Free school meal requests dropped considerably due to the change in benefits. There is also an issue with processing applications online as many families have no internet or no tablet/laptop. If you are unable to access and apply online then you can't avail of the service.

The school census, which is due to be taken shortly, is based on free school meals and from this information school budgets are set. If full entitlement is not utilised, then this has an impact a school's allocated budget.

3. Education Authority – Michael Hogg (Youth Service)

On 20th March 2020, youth provisions were all stood down and therefore Youth Services stopped working. The EA had to come up with new services and out of this, schemes such as Eat Well Live Well originated.

Engagement with young people was maintained with programmes such as Youth Online, Stay Connected, which allowed any young person to go online and engage with a youth worker; and Flair, which supported children and young people with moderate mental health issues.

Other programmes linked with the PSNI to look at anti-social behaviour and 'Sanctuary' was occasionally used for a young person needing crisis respite.

Currently, there is a 5-step approach underway for the resumption of youth services. There are 20 different services in the document, but all are not moving forward at the same time, for example, targeted work progressed quickly, and generic services were resumed (now at step 5). Residential services remain at step 2 as ministerial guidance is awaited for this to progress.

Michael stated that he is hopeful that we are moving from young people in crisis to young people in recovery. There is a fund of £25,000 available until the end of March and there are several groups in North Belfast who can access this. Letters are being issued today to those successful in securing some of this funding.

The key message today is youth clubs can officially reopen. We are also aware that localised lockdowns can occur, however educational settings normally sit outside those parameters so schools would probably stay open.

4. Service Delivery During Covid – Steve Morrison (Streetbeat Youth Project)

Streetbeat Youth Project, based in Woodvale, is for 11-21 year olds and their parents. They work with around 250 young people per week in the forms of weekly groups, mentoring, counsellor-based services in Boys Model and Girls Model schools as well a drop in at Streetbeat premises. They are heavily involved in schools and currently work with 5 secondary schools in North Belfast.

In March they switched to online delivery, this was quite a smooth transition as they already had a strong online presence. It worked well. Some positives that came from an online setting was that they were able to engage with new groups, for example, Belfast Royal Academy, Hazelwood College and St Genevieve's High School, comprising of 50 young people, all came together in the one setting – something that never would have occurred beyond a virtual setting.

A virtual marathon was also created. It allowed young people to get out on their own and post photographs of their training. On the day 90 young people took part, walking or running a 10k, half or full marathon. There were also weekly social media sessions to teach young people about various topics including fitness, cookery, and art.

Negatives from being solely online was that drop in and face to face contact stopped. Vulnerable groups were also negatively affected, for example, young people with ASD disengaged completely and were not comfortable being online. However, Steve and his team still checked in with them individually via phone calls and parental updates.

In July face to face meetings resumed, with all the protocols in place. A Lottery grant enabled them to rent a space and setup outdoor marquees allowing groups to reengage. Over summer months they organised socially distant outdoor adventure activities such as kayaking and canoeing, and they were even able to take a group to climb Ireland's highest mountain.

In September, the Back to School programme started. Groups can meet at the outside space which relieves space in schools. 1-2-1 work has resumed as has the counselling and mentoring.

Q) Martin Sloane – You advised that young people with ASD had stopped engaging, have they now reengaged?

A) Steve Morrison – Yes. Once we were able to provide a space all groups fully resumed. Demand has increased to pre-Covid levels including lots of referrals from the Family Support Hubs

5. Members Updates

FSH Area:	Upper North FSH
Timeframe:	July-Sept 2020
Number of Service Requests Received in timeframe:	27
Number of Service Requests Received to date:	1300
Source of Service Requests:	Camhs, Adult Mental Health, School health nurse, Macmillan Nurse, Gateway, GP, Education welfare, self, school, Voluntary org, Social worker
Key Gaps identified:	
Mentoring face to face- primary school aged, some telephone based available but not always appropriate	
Current presenting issues are the same as previously reported, although somewhat heightened due to the virus. In particular anxiety amongst Post Primary and Primary aged children.	
ASD/ADHD assessments are also mentioned frequently, with parents being advised in particular by GPs to contact the Hub for support or assessment.	
The continued trend of behavioural issues among primary school children are also mentioned in referrals.	

Key Successes identified:

The Upper North Hub continued throughout lockdown.

Edith and I worked in partnership to target schools in Upper and Lower North Belfast to encourage nominations of families for the Belfast City Council/Bytes donations of 10" tablets. All tablets have been allocated to local families.

Covid Response money- allocated by CYPSP to help each Family Support hub. Hub members were emailed details of this funding which is intended to help each hub lead body to respond to some of the practical barriers and pressures felt by families who may be seeking support through the hub services network, across the pandemic period, for example food poverty.

All referrals have been processed unless above Tier 2 or if no contact from the family. Families that have been offered family support are still very much keen to engage even though it's not face to face support, as they are under such stress they are grateful for the intervention.

We are now back to our monthly Hub meetings online via Zoom.

AOB for Sharing:

6. A.O.B.

- Martin Sloane – Regarding feedback from the Belfast Area Outcome Group, there was a lot of conversation around resilience in children and planning for the future. Poverty, education, and disability service are all prominent issues.
- Katrina Newell – Katrina informed the group that she is stepping down as Chair. She will remain part of the Locality Planning Group, although no longer in the capacity of Chair. Martin Sloane thanked her for her contribution and commitment to the group. Jenny Potter (Vice – Chair) has agreed to become Chairperson on a temporary basis.