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Hi everyone

I hope that you are well.

As some of the lockdown restrictions are starting to be eased across the country, I wanted to write to provide you with an update about our services.

Before that however, I just wanted to say a simple thank you for everything you are doing.

General update

At the time of writing we have had 24 people we support who are or have been symptomatic since the start of the pandemic, eight of whom have been tested positive. Although we continue to have one person still ill in hospital, I am delighted to say that he is no longer in ICU and is making remarkable progress. We have had no further Covid related deaths since I last wrote to you, though I am sad to have to let you know that Pat Lord, who has lived in our services for well over 30 years, passed away in the early hours of this morning. I know Pat will be missed by many of you who cared for her over the years.

Each illness and death brings its own heartache and my thoughts are very much with everyone who has been affected by this illness in both our professional and private lives.

As a staff team we continue to adapt and show a remarkable level of resilience. At present we have 10 staff (of an almost 800 strong workforce) self-isolating due to either themselves or members of their household being symptomatic. Additionally we now have 107 staff who are vulnerable themselves and are currently working from home away from care delivery for the foreseeable future. Since the start of the pandemic 16 members of staff have tested positive and thankfully only two have required hospital care. One member of staff is still in hospital though I am really pleased to report that he is also now out of ICU and beginning his recovery. I know everyone wishes him a speedy and full recovery.

Day Services

I appreciate that our day services have now been closed since 18th March and many of you are undertaking a range of activities to support people in and outside their family homes as well as through all manner of online activities. Many of you are providing the people we support with regular phone calls to make sure that the whole family is supported as much as is possible given the continued closure of our day service buildings. I would particularly like to thank those staff who have volunteered to do shift work as this has enabled us to let more staff in the vulnerable category stay at home and therefore reduce the particular risks they face due to this virus.

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Although some businesses and services up and down the country are starting to ease restrictions and re-open, we are following government advice and taking a very cautious approach to the bringing together of people with learning disabilities, given the particular vulnerabilities of the people we support. We have no plans to re-open any buildings based services in the immediate future.

That said, we have started to think about what our services might look like in the future in order to provide some level of buildings based day service, which in turn may be able to support family carers. We are very much at the start of this process and we are working through a series of risk assessments to ensure that, when we do start to re-open, we can do so in a safe manner. It is highly likely that in the first instance this will need to be with a reduced number of days and a reduced number of people per day in order that we can maintain the recommended social distancing. There are so many unknown variables at the moment which means I am not in a position to commit to a timescale as yet. I do not want to commit to re-opening services before we can be assured that we can do so safely. What I can confirm is that, when we do start to re-open, people who live at home with family carers will be our initial priority.

Respite

Our respite services have remained open throughout the pandemic, albeit not always from the same buildings as previously. We have opened up the respite side of Scott Hall as a second emergency unit and we are using Farfield and Cross Heath as respite services, dependant upon the bookings each week. We are trying to be more flexible about our respite offer. This includes offering nights for just one person at a time or stays just for siblings. Thank you for your incredible flexibility, this is enabling some families to have a much needed break.

Supported Living

Our supported living services have also continued to adapt to life under lockdown with an incredible level of flexibility and resilience. I am incredibly proud of the service we have continued to be able to provide and the low numbers of infections.

Our primary goal is to reach the end of this pandemic as safely as possible for all concerned. Covid-19 has changed all our lives.

Before signing off, I just wanted to ask if anyone has any time to put your talents to good use. We already have a great array of fabulous online groups that have sprung up over the last couple of months and we are now wanting to put together a programme of online activities for the people we support which can be accessible to people across the service. I have seen a number of great activities that are being posted online from staff with hobbies and skill sets including baking/dancing/singing/keep fit and sometimes just chatting. I confess to having none of these skills (particularly the dancing/singing/kitchen based ones) – but I am keen that we harness this talent to have a range of online activities available to all the people we support. If you have a hobby or interest and have time to kill, please contact your manager so that we can make the best use of those skills for the benefit of the people we support.

Finally, I would like to thank you for doing such an amazing job to keep everyone safe. Keep being kind to each other and I'll see you on a night out at the other side.

Keep well and stay safe



Andy Rawnsley
Chief Executive



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