

# Case Study

## Facilitating community engagement and ensuring mental well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic

Amy Mitchell, Divisional Head of Occupational Therapy for Mental Health and Learning Disabilities, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

### BACKGROUND



Amy Mitchell serves as the Divisional Head of Occupational Therapy for Mental Health and Learning Disability services at ABUHB.

Amy manages approximately 125 members of staff, all of which are either registered occupational therapists, occupational therapy support workers, technicians and some recovery workers.

Amy and her team provide both primary and secondary care for mental health and learning disabilities across community and inpatient settings.

### CHALLENGES



The Rainbow Packs took quite a lot of effort and resource, as did coordinating donations and generating funding.

Ensuring all stakeholders understood the value of the intervention was also challenging and they needed to ensure the packs were not seen as gifts or freebies as some called them and that they understood they were personalised and included clinical intervention and information.

Amy initially struggled to be heard in tactical COVID-19 meetings as the main priority was infection prevention and control. However, as time passed, the importance of supporting people's welfare became quite clear, and Amy was able to get her points and ideas across.

Amy and her team relied on new and existing research or literature to make their business case and to ensure the teams' ideas were supported by evidence.

### AIMS



Early in the pandemic, Amy and her team became aware that the pandemic would have a significant impact on people's day-to-day lives and productivity – particularly when the nation was put into lockdown.

The team found themselves concerned for their mental health and learning disability service users and they knew the pandemic would have an even greater impact on their ability to take part in community-based services that were deemed highly beneficial.

To combat the likely effects of lockdown, Amy and her team developed information packs for their users, led by Lucy Goodwin, Head OT for Adult Mental Health. They created a robust booklet to advise on how to maintain occupational balance and routine during the day and promote ways to keep in touch with people throughout the pandemic.

The team began collecting donations, specifically activity kits, toiletries, non-perishables, and items that would keep people occupied in terms of self-care.

The team paired these donations with their new information booklet, letters from the Health Board and mental health services, and additional contact information, to create what they called "Rainbow Packs".

The team personalised each pack, based on the patients likes and dislikes, and sent them out to their users to highlight their availability and provide additional information. They partnered with organisations such as Growing Space, to provide activity kits to their users and keep people engaged during lockdown.

## OUTCOMES

The Rainbow Packs were a huge success and resulted in an innovative approach to delivering a service.

This has given Amy and team the confidence to present other new ideas at meetings and it has enabled more people to look for solutions and be open minded to innovation.

The pandemic and feedback received has highlighted that kindness should be at the core of mental health services and a connected relationship between practitioners and patients has helped to break down barriers between the two parties.

“At the core of mental health services, there should be kindness and a connected relationship between practitioners and patients.”

“I think [the pandemic] has blurred the boundaries a lot more, with everybody struggling with their mental health, and I think it’s been a way of promoting kindness and connectedness alongside obviously the occupational aspects.”

*Amy Mitchell*

## NEXT STEPS

Following on from the creation of their first Rainbow Packs, Amy and her team regularly produce these packs and have developed variations for on-boarding and upon discharge from the service.

Packs have also made their way into the wider teams, with medics and clinicians highlighting how useful they have been when facilitating intervention.

Going forward, Amy would like to see the team do more online – for example, offering support via online sessions and promoting community-based activities online.

Post-pandemic there is scope to continue to utilise digital resources alongside physical resources and Amy hopes to offer virtual versions of their popular programmes so that more people can engage.

