

Dear All

It would be safe to say that 2020 was an interesting and challenging year for all of us.

As you know, we became an employee owned organisation in July 2019. Peter Millar retired as Chief Executive in February 2020, not long before we went into our first lockdown - not the start to retirement he'd have thought.

The pandemic has played a very big part in all of our lives for the past year and it continues on with the new lockdown from 4/1/21, continuing at the moment until mid-February. The daily efforts being made by staff at all levels are hugely appreciated. Managing ongoing support during this period has placed a huge strain across all health and social care organisations – Aspire has not been immune to that.

Our first lockdown was particularly challenging as no-one really knew what to expect. We have a much better understanding now, although the more transmissible variant of the virus has changed our responses and plans again.

Managing Risk

RAG System - We adapted our winter risk management system to respond to Covid 19.

1. Red - highest risk. People with no family, natural supports, or have very high dependency levels. People at immediate risk of harm if they had no staff.
2. Amber - middle risk. May have some supports, or have less dependency levels than 1 above.
3. Green - lowest risk. People who require less support than Red or Amber. People with family members who can provide help if needed, to allow us to protect those in amber and red.

This has been implemented where required but thankfully not frequently since March last year as a result of low staffing levels from sickness or self-isolation. Frequent meetings - councils, other providers, the care inspectorate in support of this. Aspire utilising this less than many other providers.

At one point last year we had 24 staff off on furlough. We've had a number of staff and supported individuals who have tested covid positive. Thankfully to date only a few have been hospitalised. We're delighted to say that all have got back out of hospital and have or are recovering.

Like most organisations, we'd had to adapt quickly to changing guidance and demands. Office based staff have had to grapple new IT, ways of working and keeping in close contact with colleagues wherever they are.

Updated Staff Guidance

Trying to keep up with changing PPE and guidance generally has been very time-consuming. We worked hard to find the right PPE for all (same used by the NHS). We obtained over 200 visors for staff (from a college) and hand sanitizer (from a whisky company) when neither could be purchased in the early stages of the 1st wave.

We have sent out updated guidance regularly since February last year and will continue to do that to ensure we implement government advice as it evolves, minimising risk to all.

Acts of Kindness

We've seen so many acts of selflessness and kindness from supported individuals, their families and staff. A lot of amazing work takes place without any fanfare or desire for recognition. Some acts listed below.

- One member of staff (whilst supporting one of our individuals) heard the neighbours smoke alarm. They opened the individual's front door and realised the neighbours flat was on fire and acted quickly assisting the individual as well as her two dogs out of the flat just as the windows of the flat exploded. Thankfully no-one was hurt but showed a huge amount of bravery and care.
- Staff members staying at work for days on end to protect vulnerable people due to coronavirus
- Making and delivering food to people who can't get out (thousands of meals over the period)
- Christmas day lunch organised at the rotunda for supported individuals (homeless services)

Compliments Received – More on our website

SDS Services

- D said he was over the moon with everything, all of his team are a credit to Aspire and he is so happy with every single one of them. D's friends and family said they have noticed a huge difference in him and says he has the twinkle in his eye is back. D said everything has been great and he is so happy.
- 'During the review Mr and Mrs M were singing your praises , they feel their son's service is in safe hands and that you always go above and beyond for the whole family' [Cumbernauld Social Worker, Jun 2020]
- 'I haven't been more settled in home care with any company until Aspire so thank you' [CO, Central Support Worker, Jun 2020]
- I'm so happy at the quick response and help that I could cry [Supported Individual's Daughter, May 2020]

Outreach Services

- 'I have used Aspire for a number of clients when I worked in Receiving Services and now in the area team, and they are a wonderful service. I have actually used them 3 times during lockdown to commence new services (under STI at present) with vulnerable adults on my case load'.
- In my role as a social worker in NW Glasgow, formulating care plans for vulnerable adults that have been referred under Adult Support and Protection legislation, Aspire have been a highly reliable and truly inspiring service provider.
- Aspire have provided an excellent service to several of my clients in recent months, often under challenging circumstances related to the individual client's circumstances. I feel they go above and beyond to help and are so adaptable. I cannot recommend their service enough". TM, Senior Officer, Social Work Services, Glasgow City Health & Social Care Partnership

Working Together, Supporting Each Other

Staff were really appreciative of the weekly clap for carers. Social care staff were often forgotten in the discussion around covid initially but we see an increased respect for the difficult job they do every day.

We know we're not perfect and have ongoing challenges, like all organisations. We want to continually improve the quality of support we provide, wherever it's needed. We also want to ensure there is a respectful, supportive relationship between our staff and supported individuals/families.

What's Next in 2021

Rollout of the vaccine – we have booked a large amount of staff in for their 1st vaccines which is a really great step forward. Yesterday, we received information regarding testing kits which will be rolled out over the next few weeks to allow staff to test themselves regularly at home.

We need to keep doing a lot of the same for the next few months, keeping people as safe as we can and supporting each other through the pandemic which has been difficult for each of us. We want to continue to be as kind and supportive to each other as possible and look forward to resuming a life that feels more normal into 2021.

We're hopeful that staff will be able to receive a bonus this year. We've had a challenging time beyond covid, staff changes - gaps in senior positions etc but hopefully, we're heading into a steadier space which will allow us to focus more on what we do, how we do it and why we do it.

We recently sent out a staff questionnaire and will develop one for supported individuals and families. Both of these will influence our future actions 'you said, we did'.

Finally

Hopefully this has given a taste of some of the things we did last year and what we're hoping to do this year.

Please stay safe, Ruth

Ruth McIntyre, CEO Aspire