



## Age UK Enfield – our creative response to Covid-19

If you asked me at the year whether we thought we'd be able to transform our services overnight, I would have laughed. However that became all of our reality in March and so this is a recap of the past 12 weeks of lockdown from our perspective at Age UK Enfield.

At the point of lockdown we were running 24 weekly fitness classes, three weekly, walking groups, four Tai Chi sessions, weekly Memory Club and weekly groups to bring people together and share stories over a cuppa.

Covid-19 appeared and suddenly the whole population learnt a new vocabulary; lockdown, social distancing, shielding, extremely vulnerable groups etc and a new understanding of safety measures and restrictions for our entire population we work alongside.

Age UK Enfield fired into action offering immediate relief and reassurance to a huge population of older people that reside in the borough. Our phones practically rang off the hook initially with relatives from around the world phoning on behalf of their loved ones who were in the vulnerable or extremely vulnerable groups. This was in addition to the thousands of older people we usually help each year.

We were overwhelmed with kind offers from members of the community wanting to volunteer their skills and support to the many older people who were feeling extremely worried and anxious. In such an ever changing landscape, it was vital for us, as the lead organisation for older people in the borough to help as many people as possible through this difficult time.

All of our services adapted and modified, most of our services became telephone based and worked from home. Everyone had to upskill and learn to use Zoom and other digital platforms to communicate. This made us ponder how we can help older people to be digitally connected to others, so we helped people to download apps on their devices if they had them. Donated recycled devices to people who had internet connection and we launched virtual Tea & Chatter to replace our groups, a weekly singalong to replace our choir.

Whilst our key frontline services like home care continued with PPE, we also developed Covid-19 specific response services like hot meals, prescription collection, shopping and telephone befriending utilising the wonderful volunteers.

As we had to swiftly stop all of our regular fitness classes and activities that brought people together to reduce isolation, we had to swiftly fill these gaps. Luckily we have a fantastic team, who feel passionately about enabling older people and who continually come up with inspiring ways to reach out to people.

Thinking creatively we considered how to reach people who had access to the internet and the larger cohort who didn't and just how we could reach them

Our specialist dementia hub, Parker day centre normally sees around 80 people per week; instead staff began to visit people at home using person centred approach the team offer; music, dancing, arts and crafts and CST sessions. Families have benefited from continuity, stimulation, companionship and fun, as well as some much needed respite.

Since lockdown we've developed 1400 home exercise packs that our Fit for Life project manager Mark devised with the help of colleagues. This has been hugely popular and includes a home exercise pamphlet, resistance band and relaxation tips. There is a follow along video on You Tube for those who can access the internet.

Our ICAN service that usually holds Tea& Chatter meetings put together a home based activity pack which included puzzles, seeds and scented objects, alongside tea & biscuits and hand delivered these out to 100 participants.

Our Falls Prevention Service and Memory Club have devised and begun to circulate activities packs specifically for people with balance problems or cognitive difficulties. Both follow the model that Mark devised of using a home pack with online support so can reach wider into the community.



The Falls Pack contains Tai Chi exercises to follow at home and the Memory Club pack is bursting with reminiscence, puzzles, colouring, song sheets and a gift like a puzzle, art kit and sensory gift. You can find our online videos on our You Tube channel and we use Facebook for live activity sessions like Dementia Singalong.

I'm personally incredibly proud of my organisation, our dedicated group of staff and volunteers who love working with older people, and take pride in providing the best service possible. During these times, it is this dedication, along with creativity and often a sense of fun that gets us all through.

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