

## **REMOTE WORKERS MEETING**

**Wednesday 01/07/2020**

**Present:** Salim, Farrukh, Catherine, Rosie, Vikki, Kalpna, Zuma, Birgit, Patsy, Frank, Ian L., Louise, Judith K., Raminder, Rosy, David, Geoff, Gillian, Peter, Vanita, Jamie, Malcolm, Mike S., Mahtab, Rita, Chris, Leena, Pui Wah Carter, Sue

### **SALIM – Bureau updates**

-we are currently raising funds for training, IT and casework. We have received some funding already for IT and have used this to purchase new laptops.

-we are still awaiting distribution of the funding from CA

-preparations are in progress to open the office gradually and have already purchased hand sanitisers, have put up some dividers, purchased masks etc.

-whilst the office is closed I have been trying to carry out much needed works eg painting the walls. Trying to get WBC to contribute to these works

- if we have IT technical issues, we can contact Quorum (now called Complete IT) or ICT service desk (CA) for work devices. For work/personal device contact CA IT team on T: 0300 5000 400 support@citizensadvice.org.uk (details on S&V page).

### **ROSIE: Training updates**

- The second part of the learning about the Financial Conduct's Authority Senior Management & Conduct Rules needs to be completed by all (as we all provide debt advice). The learning is on Docebo (S&V page) and is followed by a test.
- We have 5 new trainee assessors on rota: Roy, Gillian, Rita, Raminder, Ian L.
- We have 2 new trainees assessors Zuma and Maria ...welcome!
- Catherine: there is a lot of training available on Docebo,; please log on and if there is any training you would like to do and speak to Rosie to arrange

: please familiarise yourself with redundancy information on the public site as it is anticipated that, with full furlough coming to an end, we may see many clients seeking assistance with redundancy issues

## **FARRUKH:**

- The Board will be meeting next Tuesday (7/7/20) and top of the agenda will be preparations for return to the office
- We are assured by Salim that WCA is OK with finances for this year. We are working on funding for next year.

## **CATHERINE:**

- thank you to all those who are working from home
- STATISTICS: 1/6 – 30/6/20:
  - \* 334 Adviceline calls; the highest number we have done
  - \* 935 case write ups on Casebook
  - \* 165 Simple queries
  - \* 164 Advice appointments
  - \* 70 info emails
  - \* 93 referrals on work queue
  - \* 41 Evidence forms. The person that did the most is Mahtab .....well done!
- Mahtab: the issue that we raised the most EF for was UC indicating how diffic it was for cls to apply for UC eg no computers, not being able to get through to DWP for telephone applications and consequently cls suffering hardship. (Mahtab then briefly went through the process to raise EF)
- In response to Farrukh`s question on how we are getting on with webchat and emails:

Vikki: we are getting quite a few emails approx. 4/5 a day, more at the beginning of the week. Some of these are being dealt with by ASS as Simple Queries. Some are not Watford residents – these are being picked up as we ask for postcode details before proceeding.

Catherine: In June we had 70 emails enquiries and approx. 30-40 in May . We have webchat only for HTC. We are currently considering offering general webchat; in discussion with Salim.

Mahtab: not receiving many enquires on HTC webchat and from those that are received it appears that it is mostly the young who use this option. Language difficulties probably prevent

many from using webchat. Probably receive between 2-5 webchats a day inc those missed as I'm (Mahtab) also on Adviceline.

Catherine: if anyone is interested in taking enquiries by webchat, please look on Docebo HTC training and on Cablink then let Catherine know.

- Data protection important when working from home. Please ensure cl data is shredded daily; if don't have shredding facility, then keep out of sight until you return to the office and shred. Any pictures of doc etc shared with ASS eg on skype, please ensure you don't inadvertently show cl's details on picture. Any small breach should be reported to Catherine as the breach won't be as bad as the possible consequences. Delete all outgoing calls and downloads from devices and remember to delete trash too.
- Risk assessments have been done for staff who are returning to work on 6/7/20 and will soon start the risk assessments for remaining staff and volunteers. Will shortly respond to all who have shown a willingness to return to the office. There is no pressure on anyone to return to the office and can continue to work from home.
- Return to the office will be in stages: stage 1-telephone, stage 2 – limited F2F advice appointments, stage 3 – limited F2F GW. At present anticipate reaching stage 3 by end of July but this is provisional and can change.

Catherine went through the list of attendees at the workers meeting asking how they are doing, what their plans were for returning to work and what we can do to make them feel safe at the office. A summary of the points raised:

-happy to carry on work from home as can take more calls/less distraction

-happy to carry on from home as a family member is vulnerable with health condition

-happy to come to office but concerned about F2F if cl comes in with children and layout of room to include screens

-happy to come back to work but not F2F in small rooms/ happy to do adviceline from small room

-concerned about doing reception work but would consider it if provision of screen, masks, gloves and only 1 person permitted in at a time

- concerned that office should be well ventilated if people are to come back

- Judith yesterday completed her contract working as housing advisor for WCA and New Hope. Thank you to Judith K for all her hard work and for helping Vanita progress in taking over this role.

## **MIKE S. – social**

- Hoping to arrange regular social on particular day every month. For July at least this will still be remote/virtual. Planning on bingo with a prize and quiz. Everyone invited to put preferred dates on the chat now (during workers meeting).

## **Watford Mayor, Peter Taylor speaker**

-priority has been to support those in most need and working with various local charity groups eg New Hope, YMCA and W3RT.

-Mayors Small Grants Fund of £50,000 lasted just 1 month

-the Covid19 appeal fund £100,000 allocated to various charities, venues and businesses inc. working with local book clubs, Pump House Theatre, Watford Palace Theatre and Coliseum – watfordtogether.co.uk to improve peoples mental health. Grants have been paid quickly.

-working with local businesses to provide help with reopening after lockdown

-Council continues to operate however, trying to deal with the extra spending with the loss of income. Govt. contributes to approx.. ¼ of the loss suffered to ensure essential services eg bin collections continue.

-Intu shopping Centre will not be closing. It is the most profitable in the country and 3<sup>rd</sup> busiest. Council is the freeholder.

-crime is down in Watford – halved in March & April. Police in town ctr has doubled including plain clothes officers.

-Mid April had a high number ie 200 cases of C19 cases at Watford General. This week approx. 30 cases.

-Mayor agreed to put in “a good word” with the Council to enable WCA to use the offices in the building left vacant at present by Signpost and Age UK. Salim stated that we could make good use of this space when returning to work at the office as need space to see clients F2F and also we have other organisations that use our space that we manage eg organisations assisting with DV cases where a safe space is need to meet with their clients. The Mayor said he would see hat he could do and copy in CM and Salim.

Catherine – if anyone would like anything raised/discussed at board meeting next Tuesday 7/7/20 to contact Mike S. – Volunteers Rep/CM – staff rep. To discuss social contact Mike S.

**NEXT WORKERS MEETING:** Thursday 6th August 2020 at 9:30am-11:30am (Remote)

## **Thursday 4th June 2020**

**ATTENDING (31):** Catherine, Vikki, Kalpna, Rosie, Salim, Farrukh, Pui Wah Carter, Ian K, Malcolm, Frank, Helen, Afshan, Jamie, Jerome, Lesley, Carmel, Patsy, Ruth, Penny, Judith, Shelly, Annette, Raminder, Rita, Rosy, Birgit, FM, Mahtab, Ian L, (rest displaying as “unknown”) - total 31

**GUEST SPEAKER:** Karen Lingwood from Herts MIND Network talking about Mental Health & Wellbeing

**SALIM:** Opening of Bx :

- the Council have asked about our plans to reopen the office and enquired as to what support we would need
- CA are providing support with materials on carrying out risk assessments and adjustments at the premises and have also asked what we need to ensure that staff feel safe to return to work at the office.
- In view of above, Salim has sent out a survey to all with questions on what would make you feel safe to return to work and suggest any adaptations that would assist in this. Please complete and return these surveys.
- WCA is looking for specific funding to assist with above. CA have received funding from central govt. But we are unsure yet whether and if so how much of this will be distributed to individual bureaux.
- WCA has received external funding to train people to work remotely - RW is managing this fund.

**ROSIE:** training:

- More than happy to provide training/learning material inc webinars for those who are looking to expand their knowledge whilst waiting to return to work. CM added that we should all be checking Docebo on S&V page for trainings available; to discuss with RW if there is training you are interested in.
- “Thank you for your patience” to the group of new volunteers who started in January and were just some 2 weeks away from their starting on the rota before lockdown. They will be starting by taking calls on Advice Line from next week.

**FARRUKH:**

- Thanked all staff & volunteers for their efforts during these difficult times.
- Looking to ensure that we have a safe working environment at the Bx to enable us to return to work
- Stressed that if anyone feels uncomfortable or are caring for someone vulnerable, then to let CM/Salim know to return to work.

## **MALCOLM:**

- Presenting a tour of the S&V page within its new layout. Malcolm stated this is still work in progress

## **CATHERINE:**

### **1. Stats:**

- Referred to the new "Covid19 Project" started approx. 2 weeks ago. We have a team of 9 assessors managed by CM and VM, contacting cl`s who had been in contact with WCA over the last year, over the age of 69 years and/or with MH conditions and/or suffering mid/long term health Conditions to check how they were and to ask if there were any issues on which they needed advice & assistance. To date we have contacted over 100 clients. Feedback from the assessors working on the Project:
  - Rita: the project provided a good introduction for her as a new assessor before starting on the Advice line rota
  - Ian L.: feedback from clients was very positive; the cls he spoke with were happy with the support they received from WCA and were happy to be called.
- In April we:
  - took 208 AL calls;
  - Provided 116 Advice appointments
  - Received 32 enquiries via the info@ email
- In May we:
  - Took 247 AL calls
  - Provided 135 Advice appointments
  - Received 43 enquiries via info@ email
  - These figures are in addition to the calls made on the Covid19 Project

### **2. Other News:**

- Carlos has left us to continue his final year studies. He had indicated that he may return to WCA as a volunteer in due course
- Vanita has been appointed as the new Housing Advisor (to work on the project with New Hope and WCA) to take over from Judith who will be working as a Money Advisor at WCA.
- As this week is Volunteers Week, there will be a Remote Social evening this Friday at 7pm via the catch up link (BYOB, chat & connect!)
- Thank you to all the staff who have moved and adjusted to remote working from the office to the home so quickly and so well.

Went around to everyone at the meeting to say a few words on how they were and what they have been doing since last workers meeting/lockdown if not attended latter.

**NEXT WORKERS MEETING: Wednesday 1st July 2020 9.30am**

**Thursday 7/3/19**

**Attending:** Catherine, New trainees, Carlos, Pat, Brenda, Penny, Judith, Vikki, Jamie, Jan, Rosie, Sabina, Birgit, Mathab, Aparna, David, Steven (Trustee/Chair), Farooq (trustee), Kalpna

**Rosie:** Invites new GW trainees & thanks all who have assisted in supporting observations

**CM:** Quiz on Universal Credit

On 1/4/19 WCA receiving funding directly from DWP for providing Help To Claim UC to clients. Currently funding was going from DWP to Council to us.

Before suggesting to clients that they should claim UC, go through a QBC with cl to see whether they would be better off on UC or on staying on current legacy benefits.

Not all changes in circumstances trigger transfer to UC from legacy benefits (see Trigger examples on Staff & Volunteer page)

BEFORE sending clients to UC workshop/Help to Claim appointment, they would still need GW to explore and check entitlement, check UC eligibility criteria and if worse/better off from any legacy benefits.

Rosie/Aparna working on providing training on benefit checks.

**HELP TO CLAIM (HTC):**

- Drop in/adviceline (on a national line so check eligibility and place on work Q for UC for local Bx.) Adviceline for HTC is separate to current AL. There will be different drop down list for work Q for HTC.
- Webchat (WC) (Penny/Mahtab) National base. St Albans already have WC - only had 2 client over last 3 months.
- For WC clients would need to access public site where there is a link for webchat for UC HTC. So if no appointments available, refer client to WC 8am-6pm.
- Cablink has info re HTC (Aparna can assist). 5 Steps:
  - a. Client comes in via walkin/WC/AL
  - b. Individual needs assessed eg can they use computer, what help do they want eg is just a qu then no need for app. If assistance needed to claim then give app. Penny will be helping in groups (3-4) on Friday in training room and Mahtab can provide 1-1 help where needed during the week. Other volunteers can assist with HTC. Clients can use computers in interview rooms/reception rooms or training room. We will be able to scan doc to verify online so cl will not need to attend the JC to verify; they will still need to attend the JC for the 1st interview for cl. Commitment. CA website has links to a video on UC claim process.
  - c. Support to start claim.
    - check entitlement (gov.uk)

- set up email (if claimed before and claim stopped or closed then new applic may need new email). If cl doesn't have an email - set up in Bx to save time
- set up UC a/c (gov.uk "start a claim")
- work through "to do list"
- access to phone or home visit service if cl is vulnerable/disabled. Spk to DWP for home visit or phone to start claim. If cl cannot access journal, highlight this to DWP so no sanction. (CM has template letter). If client has language issues, should let JC know in advance as can arrange telephone translator service which has to be booked.
- Couples must claim together or take a link for partner who must be able to claim themselves.
- clients must have a bank account. If client doesn't have a bank account - set up in Bx to save time
- d. Verify ID and create list of evidence needed, understand payment methods and adaptations needs eg long term sick or disabled to notify DWP: these can be added to journal and send template letter (CM) so that the client's work coach does not ask client to do what they cannot. Advance needs to be paid in next 12 months so check if cl needs to apply; explain it will be deducted from future payments. Can claim ½ advance.
- e. Access to longer term support eg housing signpost/referral/appointment (seperate to HTC)

Penny will do her last UC workshop at library end of March.

**ROSIE:** Training updates.

Gee - Advisor certificate

Judith - GW certificate

**APARNA:** Equality & Diversity Co-ordinator

Updates: Tomorrow International Womens Day - wear purple for solidarity

Discrimination: See Emma Wilkinson blog on public site

Newsletter on E & D - speak to Aparna on how to register for this

**OUTCOMES:** Everyone to enter details on Outcome log on notice board. Can be monetary value or otherwise eg prevent homelessness.

: Every workers meeting will have slots to discuss Outcomes

**ROSIE & VIKKI** preparing training on Outcomes

**BUREAU UPDATE:**

**INITIAL CHECKS:** Initial checks for the period 11/2-6/3 have seen more clients than we would have done, turn aways have gone down. This is useful as funding from WBC looks at the number of turnaways.

**SIMPLE QUERIES:** Simple queries: no need to have client details, not include issues such as debt or benefit, not include a dispute and further exploration not required. Not to be used for F2f. CM and Rosie will train its use on adviceline. CM has spreadsheet for simple queries on adviceline to keep stats. Do not use simple queries for anonymous clients.

**RESEARCH & CAMPAIGN:** CM will lead. Team includes Ruth, Dina and Aparna. Meeting to discuss on 8/3/19 @ 11am - anyone interested is welcome to attend.

**STAFF SHORTAGES:** Pls check list in kitchen and note down extra availability

NUMBERS for January 2019:

- We saw 236 cl at GW F2F (above target of 220)
- Answered 202 adviceline calls - highest over the year

**BOOKS:** we will be ordering new books so if there are any reference books that you find particularly useful pls speak to CM by 15/3/19. CM has list of books on the post room door with books crossed out being the ones not being ordered.

**HEALTH & SAFETY:** Old mugs will be given stickers and will be thrown away in 2wks if not claimed.

**HOW TO COMPLETE EVIDENCE FORMS:** step by step guide on wall in ASS room

**HOW TO COMPLETE CONSENT FORMS:** step by step guide will be put up in all interview rooms

**VOLUNTEERS` REP:** Geoff

**NEXT WORKERS MEETING:** TUESDAY 2nd April 2019 9.30am at Wellspring