

North Argyll Carers Centre Community Planning Update - August 2021

With the lifting of restrictions we have been able to carry out a phased return to face to face support with carers at our centre on Albany Street. Initially we focused on provision of manual therapies for carers and cared-for as this service had not been available during lockdowns and clearly cannot be undertaken remotely. Demand was very high with many carers really feeling the physiological effects of increased caring demands and the ongoing stress of the last year. Staff returned to the centre from the start of June and from mid July we have begun an appointment system for carers who need to meet with our Adult Carer Support Workers face to face where remote support is not appropriate and home/garden visits not possible. This has been operating successfully now for a number of weeks.

The changes to restrictions and the arrival of the good weather have allowed us to run activities for groups of young and adult carers outdoors and we have had some really fun and well-received sessions with carers of all ages. We have worked with Hebridean Pursuits and Ardroy Outdoor Centre to deliver physical activities for young carers such as climbing and coasteering. Adult carers have taken part in mindful walks both on the mainland and on Mull and Tiree. We have started up our 'Blether' Group which meets on the Terrace at Dunollie and have begun our Healthy Villages groups, and Still Caring bereavement support groups, taking activities out to community venues across the Oban, Lorn and Isles area. It has been very exciting for us to be able to resume this work which is so core to our delivery of carer support. All who have taken part have told us that they have loved the opportunity to get back together in person and have the chance to socialize and meet with friends they have not been together with for so many months. We intend to retain a blended approach to delivering groups and activities for carers, with a continued online offer as well as face to face groups, as for many of the more geographically remote carers and those with the most demanding caring roles this has enabled them to take part in peer support groups and activities they could not otherwise have accessed.

In June we ran a number of activities as part of Carers Week, raising awareness of carers' roles, issues and the support we can offer. A member of our team and a carer were interviewed on Oban FM to raise awareness and we were very grateful that the radio station ran a follow-up article on their website promoting Carers Week. We held a number of gentle, mindful walks across the week starting at locations across the area. At our coffee morning, as well as the usual quizzes and chat, The Walking Theatre Company put on an online production for us, which was great fun and gave all the carers and cared-for people who attended a welcome break from routine. We have continued to work with the Walking Theatre Company and have held an intergenerational event with them with a production delivered for carers of all ages at the Greenshoots Walled Garden and woodland. We are also grateful to Hope Kitchen and the team at Greenshoots for their help in delivering this event.

Other than groups and appointments we continue to work from home as much as possible, operating a limited staffing rota at the centre. We are awaiting the announcement regarding lifting of all restrictions but will continue to exercise caution in our work with carers due to the extreme medical vulnerability of many of the people they care for.