

# Enabling creativity and flexible use of personal budgets

## Community Contacts: Argyll and Bute

How a third sector organisation worked in collaboration with social workers to meet the needs of people with personal budgets during COVID-19.

*“Creativity is supporting mental health and wellbeing during lockdown – for individuals, their families and for staff.”*



Becs Barker, Operations Manager, Community Contacts

### What was the community need?

COVID-19 and lockdown regulations have had a significant impact on health and social care with many services not able to provide care in the way they had previously.

Through conversations with the communities across Helensburgh and Lomond, Community Contacts were aware of two key concerns related to Self-Directed Support (SDS) and people being able to access care and support during lockdown:

- as social distancing prevented social work home visits, the majority of routine assessments and reviews were being postponed or carried out by telephone, and
- there was increased pressure on families where care could not be provided in the agreed way for example when Personal Assistants (PAs) could not enter the home.

Community Contacts had existing strong relationships with social work teams in Helensburgh and Lomond who also highlighted that although emergency national guidance had been introduced to enable more flexibility there remained challenges in applying and consistently implementing it in practice.



### Background to the community organisation

Community Contacts is an independent Carr Gomm project offering impartial advice, information and support about SDS. Community Contacts currently operates in Argyll & Bute and Highland.

Funded by the Scottish Government's [Support in the Right Direction](#) initiative, Community Contacts aims to help people to design and manage their own support in a confident and informed manner. They do this in partnership with others, including the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), and local community organisations.

Community Contacts has been working in Argyll & Bute since 2013. In the Helensburgh and Lomond locality, activity is supported by a Specialist Project Worker who works closely with social workers across the Adult and Children and Families teams. Community Contacts is striving to replicate this example of partnership working across the other three localities of the HSCP.

Insights into how community groups/national organisations are responding to new community needs during COVID-19

## How was this different?

Community Contacts worked with the HSCP to promote the use of tele-conferencing for social work assessment and reviews to enable these to continue. Support from their specialist project worker continues to be provided for individuals and families in preparation, during and after assessment. This service is now being implemented successfully through close partnership working between social workers and Community Contacts. Feedback suggests that many people prefer this way of working as they feel less pressure and do not need to have professionals within their homes.

Community Contacts are working with individuals and their families to provide advice and support around spending budgets differently during COVID-19. This includes sharing understanding of new guidance and local policies and procedures to explore where flexibility can be found. This support is enabling more creative solutions to be found e.g. to identify how a PA can continue to provide support without entering a family home.

Community Contacts is also working with social workers to develop better understanding of new guidance and where this can enable people to spend their budgets in different ways e.g. to purchase equipment. One young man had been employing a PA to enable him to get out of the house. This was essential for his wellbeing but had become impossible due to lockdown. The young man was able to use his budget to buy a bike to go out cycling with his PA and to ensure his family have a break from caring.

## What was the response from the community?

*“Community Contacts has had a big role in helping us communicate with families, it’s been really helpful to work with partners who know our clients well. They have also been engaging with clients and feeding back any key issues or anxieties to social work staff that we need to address, for example around PPE for carers.”*

Edmund Coleman, Team Leader Operations, Argyll & Bute HSCP

## Key insights:

### Becs Barker, Operations Manager, Community Contacts

“It is important to recognise not only the time it takes to build relationships and trust but also the incredible value in this. Our project works really well in the Helensburgh and Lomond locality due to the relationships we have with our social work colleagues. There is a sense of true partnership working.

The use of teleconferencing has enabled assessment to continue with high levels of satisfaction being reported by people we support. We are now identified as a key part of this process as we have been able to offer a service that adds true value to both individuals and staff.

Pre COVID-19 we were working with individuals and staff to provide advice and support to better understand the complexities of SDS and enable the creative use of budgets as this can be a real challenge. National guidance has to translate into local policy and then there is a task to ensure consistency in how this is understood and implemented by everyone involved e.g. finance team, managers, families.

The new COVID-19 guidance has given us permission to be more flexible and is evidence to support discussion and overcome barriers. We are hopeful that the good practice we’ve seen during this time will continue and that there is opportunity for our role to develop across Argyll & Bute and Highland in the future.”

**If you are interested in exploring something similar in your area or to find out more, please get in touch.**

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