

Creating the conditions for a more flexible social care approach

Self-Directed Support Forum East Renfrewshire

How a community organisation worked in partnership with social workers to develop understanding and flexibility to meet new needs for individuals and their families.

“We value partnership working highly as we know it delivers good outcomes for our members and that remains our focus.”



Noleen Harte, Manager,
SDS Forum East Renfrewshire

What was the community need?

COVID-19 has changed many aspects of social care support in communities. One aspect where it has had a significant impact is on people who manage their own budget using Self-Directed Support (SDS).

Guidance from the Scottish Government has been introduced during COVID-19 to enable greater flexibility in how people are able to spend their budgets to ensure their needs continued to be met during the period of the pandemic.

The SDS Forum East Renfrewshire have trusted relationships with the community and with local social workers. They were well placed to develop understanding around challenges related to support during COVID-19 and to work alongside social workers to support the practical implementation of the new guidance.

Background to the community organisation

The SDS Forum East Renfrewshire is funded to provide practical support and information to local people thinking about directing their own support or that of someone they care for. It also supports individuals and families who are already directing an existing social care package.

The organisation was formed in 2011 by a small collective of service users and carers. It has now grown into an independent and informed organisation for others to turn to for advice, to share experiences and to feel supported around all aspects of SDS.

The Forum work in partnership with East Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and are involved in many key working groups around SDS. This provides a platform to share the views of what people in communities want and need to make SDS work well for them.



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



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How was this different?

The SDS Forum recognised that a different approach was required to meet the needs of people accessing SDS in the community and of the social workers supporting them during COVID-19.

The Forum have been able to engage with people accessing SDS across the area and to deliver accurate information related to new guidance quickly. Information sessions on key topics are being provided via Zoom. This activity has supported social work staff by lifting pressure from their service at a critical time.

Online training and discussion sessions are being provided for social work staff on the new guidance and how it could apply in practice. Examples of how local people are using budgets differently are shared. This is being offered on a one-to-one basis but plans to deliver co-hosted group sessions with the HSCP are now being progressed. This will better support peer learning and sharing of good practice. Sessions are supported and advertised by HSCP senior management.

The Forum are working in partnership with the HSCP to support the development of local SDS guidance. This includes:

- sharing learning from local guidance that is being issued in other areas
- cross referencing national guidance with existing local guidance and identifying notable changes to be addressed, and
- working with the HSCP finance team to produce local FAQs.

What was the response from the community?

“Attended training with the SDS Forum and Social Work who have the experience to go through the A-Z of a case and available options of support. Also provided an updated directory of services and examples of SDS plans... very informative service and will surely refer clients and call the service myself for more information when needed.”

Social Worker, East Renfrewshire HSCP

Key insights:

Noleen Harte, Manager, SDS Forum East Renfrewshire

“We have a relationship with the HSCP that I believe is built on mutual trust. We respect each other as professionals, and we know each other's roles.

We were aware from a recent survey that 60% of social work staff said they would access training through the SDS Forum if it were offered. We are therefore confident that we have been able to offer something that is valued and needed by social work teams. SDS is our focus - we have the subject matter knowledge and also understanding of local lived experience. Staff are happy to come and ask questions or sign up for training due to the trusted relationships we have.

We also recognise the importance of bringing staff together to learn from each other's experiences and to develop confidence in a safe space. Our activity during COVID-19 has been adapted from previous activity so we have been able to move at pace. Moving forward we would like to co-produce a framework for learning with the HSCP that we can deliver across the social work teams.

We are also trusted by our community. We help promote a really good use of SDS, making sure flexibility is given to families and there is trust that they know what is right for them. I believe this is a real time for SDS to shine, for people to be enabled to manage their own situations and respond how they need to.”

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

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