# Mental Health & Welling Support Line and Booklet

Interviewee: Gail Kay, NENC ICS Programme Director for Mental Health

**NENC ICS knew that Covid-19 was likely to cause negative mental health consequences across the population. However, the help available was generally for those experiencing a mental health crisis and there was less support for those with lower-level wellbeing concerns.**

## Approach/Methodology

NENC ICS helped to set up a mental health support line. This was done to pick up 111 calls where people have a non-crisis mental health need. This approach was further supported by the ICS suicide prevention work stream who worked in collaboration with a local charity to produce a mental health and wellbeing booklet during Covid-19, which was delivered to every household in NENC.

The mental health support line was staffed by a group of volunteer clinicians and clinicians who were supported to contribute by their organisation through flexible working arrangements. It took two and a half weeks to implement, including signing off information sharing agreements, setting up infrastructure, and getting the project management team in place.

The mental health and wellbeing booklet, created by Every Life Matters, Cumbria was delivered to every household in NENC and involved a large amount of system working and support from partners including the Academic Health Science Network North East North Cumbria (AHSN NENC) and the North East Chamber of Commerce to get it funded, printed and distributed. The impetus of Covid-19 meant that it was able to be a very quick turnaround, which would not have happened before.

## Impact

There were a lot of different places for people to go to receive mental health and wellbeing support, but they were not well known or well publicised and could be difficult to navigate. The mental health support line was able to provide a listening service, offer advice and direct people to these platforms to receive support.

The biggest success that came out of the initial data was how it showed that the support service did not have very many repeat calls. This possibly shows that when people received the intervention they needed early, it reduced the risk of them going into a crisis. The data also showed that it may have been very difficult for people to have received help elsewhere if the mental health support line was not there, as feedback from callers suggested that the support already in place was not easily accessible to members of the public. A full evaluation by Teesside University, funded by AHSN NENC, is in progress and the report will be shared on completion.

Success on the mental health and wellbeing booklet was due to having a ‘big ambition’ supported by the ICS mental health steering group to get the booklet to every household in the region. It will not possible to predict the mental health impact or who was going to be affected by Covid-19, so this was a way of pre-empting mental health issues that may have arisen by offering practical advice and access to support. The AHSN NENC were a very big help in getting the mental health booklets out there, by negotiating with the print company for the big print run and organising distribution.

## Next Steps

NENC ICS want to create a website that brings together all mental health and wellbeing resources available so that people have access to information swiftly and easily and don't have to call in to 111. They are working on this platform and also taking forward discussions to ensure something is in place which provides the level of support and advice that the mental health support line had been providing.

Funding to produce a pocket-sized version of the mental health and wellness booklet and other resources is being progressed. The electronic version has been shared across networks regionally and nationally.



## Key Learning Points

The mental health support line did not classify callers as ‘patients’, which meant the team did not medicalise or pathologise the enquiries. Instead they provided a sign posting and listening service. The calls did not go on a clinical record or attempt to create an additional clinical service. Instead they provided a bridge between people who had a mental health need but did not require a mental health services.

The biggest challenges were in the practicalities of setting up the support line. For example, when someone calls into 111 there is a call management process informed by a directory of service. The team had to set up another directory service to accommodate the service role.

For the booklet, the biggest challenge was the logistics of printing and the distribution of the booklet. The aim was also to make sure that it was printed and delivered on time for mental health week which was a tight time constraint. However, these challenges were managed well by a cohesive team approach.

Overall, it is important to remember that we are here to look after people and, whatever the project, if it's going to help people it needs to be done. It is important that we don't get caught up in the bureaucratic process and it is vital that the speed of implementation that has been achieved during coronavirus is not lost when we go back to normal ‘business as usual’. The teams involved reflected on the timeline for the projects and indicated that, had tried to do this before coronavirus, it would have taken months because they would have had to have consulted with lots of groups. It would have been very easy for someone to say no and lose sight of the intention which was ultimately to help people at a difficult time.

## Testimonial

There was a fantastic response to the mental health booklet overall. For anecdotal evidence, Gail’s neighbour saw it and said that she had talked about mental health with her family on a zoom call, which they would never have done before. Furthermore, a friend who works for the council told her that it was recirculated through their team manager who said that it was “one of the best sources of information they have received through the whole Covid-19 period.”