

## Supporting Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing in Perth and Kinross via Project ECHO

*The project enabled people to come together to be human again.*

- Lynn Blair (Independent Sector Lead, Perth & Kinross)

### Descriptor

This case study highlights the impact of Project ECHO, carried out with care home staff in Perth and Kinross in collaboration with Perth and Kinross Health and Social Care Partnership and Specialist Palliative Care Service (SPCS) as a way of providing emotional and psychological support to care home staff during unprecedented pandemic working conditions.

Project ECHO refers to a validated approach which uses video technology to connect groups over a series of sessions to form communities of practice. The ECHO acronym stands for 'Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes'.

### Features

The Perth and Kinross Health Social Care Partnership care home oversight group were looking to offer more support to care home staff to manage and process the emotional and psychological impact that the pandemic was having on them including:

- A booklet outlining self-help and online resources and the pathway to psychological services if required.
- A web page within the PKC Learning & Development website signposting resources
- A series of ECHO 90 minute weekly sessions consisting of a presentation and facilitated discussion. Programme outline was as follows:
  - Week 1 - Impact of COVID on staff wellbeing led by Dr Alison Rowlands, Consultant Clinical Psychologist
  - Week 2 - The psychological fallout on staff working in care homes led by Andy Shewan, Nurse Consultant for Psychological Wellbeing
  - Week 3 – Person-centered care for residents and staff led by Debbie Jones, Healthcare Chaplain
  - Week 4 – Resilience led by Anne Kelly and Jane Andrew, Palliative Care Educators

### Benefits

The series of weekly 90-minute ECHO sessions provided a safe and supportive space to connect staff working in different care homes.

### Impact

The ECHO reflective sessions allowed staff to work through the following feelings and stressors:

- Staff were living with survivor's guilt and experiencing a high level of stress in response to the presence of COVID infections in the care home environment.

- Some members of staff were in a state of shock upon learning about the severity of the COVID and the number of deaths.
- The pressure of keeping COVID out of their work environment and residents' home was leading to increasing levels of mental and psychological stress
- Some staff felt sceptical asking for help and support. They felt it was a sign of weakness and their inability to cope.
- It brought staff and care home managers together from across care homes in separate reflective sessions, which removed previous feelings or sentiments of competition, instead providing support for each other.
- Teams that have gone through sessions have been energized and have developed a forward-looking approach, greatly relieving previous states of mental and psychological fatigue.
- Also, the feel of just coping and being robotic has eased out with staff reporting that it made them "feel human again".

### Considerations

- The ECHO sessions were provided as a part of a wider and ongoing staff health and wellbeing package of resources that included signposting staff to self-help resources and other psychological support services.
  - Perth and Kinross are now looking to expand the ECHO sessions and open these up to more individuals in Perth & Kinross with spaces for more listening sessions set to open in November 2021.
- A short life partnership was established with the Specialist Palliative Care Service (SPCS) as the SPCS education team had previous experience of providing ECHO sessions to care homes. Now a course to train more facilitators is underway and will run twice a month.
- Worth consider staff mix of sessions and co-designing the sessions with staff to meet requirements. Perth and Kinross elected to run separate ECHO reflective programme for their managers and for their care workers.

### Potential Costs

- Provision of the ECHO sessions/psychological support via expert facilitators and training up facilitators to run these sessions
- Backfilling staff to release staff to attend weekly 90 minute sessions (likely offset by a reduction in stress-related staff absences)

### Additional information

- Lynn Blair, Independent Sector Lead, Scottish Care: [Lynn.blair@scottishcare.org](mailto:Lynn.blair@scottishcare.org)
- Social Care TEC Programme: [nss.digicarehome@nhs.scot](mailto:nss.digicarehome@nhs.scot)