Scottish Mentoring Network

Guidance for Mentoring Projects: Moving your Service Delivery Online

**In light of the current circumstances surrounding the Covid-19 outbreak, Scottish Mentoring Network have pulled together a resource pack to help our members cope with the new and ever changing factors which will impact on their projects. This document will give an overview of measures that mentoring projects can take to keep their service users, volunteers and staff safe during this time.**

**We are writing this guide for mentoring co-ordinators who are responding to the COVID-19 outbreak by moving their mentoring projects to an online delivery model. We understand that you are the experts, so please view this as a living document which we will update with tips and solutions from across our membership.**

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Chapter 1: Working from home effectively

Your organisation may have already taken the decision to implement working from home for your employees. There are a number of considerations you may have already been thinking about in these circumstances, but we have compiled some of the following tips to help you to continue collaborating and working effectively as a team from home:

* Use a tool such as [Slack](https://slack.com/intl/en-gb/lp/three?utm_medium=ppc&utm_source=google&utm_campaign=d_ppc_google_uk_en_brand-hv&utm_term=slack&ds_rl=1249094&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIrK2W9tO16AIVA4bVCh1zNwkWEAAYASAAEgLezPD_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds) or [Microsoft Teams](https://products.office.com/en-gb/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software) to replace email. This is a free app which enables your team to communicate via channels of communication (based on projects, teams, topics etc). These channels allow you to integrate with the other apps and programmes you are already using to manage your work, making sure that it is easy to share and collaborate. Microsoft Teams also has an integrated video calling function which may be a more cost effective means of video calling than paying for business subscription to [Zoom](https://zoom.us/pricing).
* Your team can also collaborate using tools such as Trello and Miro to create projects and to edit the same document simultaneously. It goes without saying that using a cloud based file sharing system is a prerequisite for working remotely (such as Google Drive, One Drive, Box, DropBox).
* Create structure with your team - whether it’s setting a time in your shared calendar for phone call or check in - to ensure that you are communicating about expectations and goals.
* Make sure you have the right hardware and software - some laptops do not have the best quality of microphone - you may wish to invest in headsets to ensure you can be heard/hear your colleagues during meetings.
* Be mindful that your employees will need to have secure systems of working too, at very least a password protected Wifi connection. Tethering to a mobile hotspot may be a solution for this in the short term.

Social distancing and staff well being

Staff may find remote working challenging and isolating during this time. It will be even more important to implement processes which help them to feel connected. Some suggestions we have compiled from across the sector include:

* Arranging a virtual tea break (using Zoom, Microsoft Teams etc) to have a catch up which is not work related, may help staff to feel connected and aid feelings of continuity
* Letting your colleagues know about the mental health support services which are available over the phone or online (see the bibliography at the end of this guide for a list of services and their contact details)
* Ensure that you are sharing reputable sources of information with your staff (such as SCVO, NHS Inform and Scottish Government websites), for the latest updates on Coronavirus
* [The Mental Health Foundation](https://mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak/while-working) has a whole host of suggestions to support your staff during this time.

Chapter 2. Online Service Delivery

Moving matches to online meetings

If your mentoring matches are already well established, your project will now need to move those matches to meeting virtually, e.g. by phone or by other means**. Your current mentoring agreement for the existing matches will need to be updated and communicated in light of the changes to how the mentor and mentee will be meeting (see below what should be included).**

In usual circumstances, SMN would not recommend that volunteer mentors give their mentees their personal phone number or need to use their personal mobile to arrange meetings. Due to current circumstances, volunteers may need to use their personal mobile or landline to make calls to mentees. In order to protect their privacy, mentors should be advised to withhold their number when making calls (your own organisation will probably already have a policy regarding this).

Mentoring can also take place via email or instant messaging. As a mentoring co-ordinator, you may wish to consider whether you need to monitor the emails between mentors and mentees. We have outlined some safeguarding procedures that you may need consider when moving to online mentoring.

If your matches are used to meeting in person, then an option which may be most comfortable for them to transition to would be video calling. If your organisation is able to take out a business subscription to Zoom or get your mentors signed up to Microsoft Teams, they can video call their mentors.

This will obviously be dependent on the technology available to mentors and mentees, as you may not have had the usual time to invest in equipment whilst advice from the government has been quickly changing.

Once you have established how your matches will communicate, you will need to get in touch with everyone as soon as possible to let them know the planned changes.

Below is a list of the different online options you could use and their pros and cons:

**Pros and cons of the types of online mentoring**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of online mentoring** | **Pros** | **Cons** |
| Email | * Free
* Quick to implement
* Easy to use
* A good vehicle for factual information
* Freedom to respond at convenient times
* Accessible from any PC or Smartphone
* Users can send attachments
* No training required
 | * Requires internet at all times
* Prone to security issues – you have to remember to log out
* Difficult to evaluate and monitor
* Monitoring can be difficult or labour-intensive
* Privacy is lacking at times
* Hard to implement an end date
 |
| Social networking sites  | * Free
* Flexible
* Easy to use
* Engaging/Interactive
* Can be a good promotional platform
* Creates community
* Increased information on mentee is available
* Appeals to young people
* Phone access – via internet enabled phones
* No training required
* Send group messages/ reminders to users
 | * How do you control who is talking to who
* Access to public viewing
* Institutions/organisations block access
* Mentors or friends- Boundary issues
* Account hacking – security threats
* Hard to monitor conversations
* Hard to implement a structure and end date
* Social networking sites are always changing or being updated – new things to learn
* Limited moderation before the message is seen
 |
| Secure ementoring platforms  | * Well monitored/low risk
* Ensures highest quality of safeguarding - Security filters
* Encourages new members to engage long term
* Safe, reassuring for parents
* Monitoring and evaluation possible – record of correspondence
* As mentors have to be trained - the quality of mentoring is good
* Professional feel to project
* Easy to share information
* You can have supporting material
 | * If messages have to be moderated = delay in receiving messages
* Cost to subscribe
* Training costs – for mentors and mentees
* Website failure – Higher risk
* More time intensive to manage - mentees forgetting their passwords
* Anonymity might not be a good thing
 |
| Monitored email exchange | * Can use outlook inbox if website fails
* Easy and familiar
* Monitoring possible – record of correspondence
* Admin – can be easy to run
 | * Admin – can be time consuming to run
* Cost
* No structured activities
* Not distinct from emails
 |

Managing matches online and providing support and supervision

As mentoring co-ordinator, you can still provide support and supervision to your mentees, but again you will need to start doing this via a digital method.

You could use a tool such as [Band](https://about.band.us/?_ga=2.225531162.1011870366.1585051964-2112155652.1585051964) or [Google Hangouts](https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/google-hangouts/nckgahadagoaajjgafhacjanaoiihapd?hl=en) to create a platform for your volunteer mentors to support each other and keep updated with how your project is operating during this time.

Calling your mentors to check in on how their mentoring meetings have been progressing is something you may already be doing but of course can continue to do where you cannot meet face to face. You may need to update your guidance on emergency contact procedures so that mentors can reach co-ordinators on their mobiles if need be.

You could create a template call log sheet for your mentors to record the details from any calls they make.

Online communication tips for your mentors

Below are some examples to go through with your mentors to help them understand how they can demonstrate active listening in their written communication with mentees.

**Conveying active listening online**

The written word can be confusing sometimes. People can write a sentence that seems direct and to the point to them, but can come across as brusque or rude to the reader.

The key to conveying your meaning online is to read back what you have written, and try to imagine someone else reading it. Ask yourself:

- Could they misunderstand / misconstrue what you are saying?

- Is there any part of your message that is ambiguous?

- Would they understand your feelings, or do you need to add some extra touches to really convey your meaning?

Here are some tips for showing that you are listening actively in an online mentoring or befriending situation:

**Show empathy**

Don’t: Ignore or dismiss difficult topics that have been raised in a message.

Do write: “I really feel for you in this situation.” “I understand what you must be going through”.

**Be respectful**

Don’t: Directly attack ideas or beliefs, even if you don’t agree with them.

Do write: “I respect what you are saying. It’s not what I believe myself, but everybody is entitled to different opinions in life.”

**Be non-judgemental**

Don’t: Assume certain things about an individual because of what they write.

Do: Stay open to learning more about them as individuals.

**Ask open questions**

Don’t: Only ask closed or direct questions.

Do write: “How are things?” “What’s been going on recently?” “What’s not working out?” “What would you like to write to me about?”

**Summarise what has been said**

Don’t: miss the opportunity to re-cap on everything that as been written in a message.

Do write: “So what you’re saying is you are interested in/ concerned/ thinking about X.”

**Be friendly**

Don’t: forget how important simple pleasantries are when communicating online.

Do write: greetings and farewells in every message, e.g. “Hi, how are things with you?” “I am looking forward to reading your next message! Bye for now.”

**Seek clarification**

Don’t: pretend / assume you understand what is meant in a message if you are not sure.

Do write: “Just to check that I have understood, do you mean X or Y?” “Am I right in thinking that you mean X?”

**Be enthusiastic**

Don’t: forget that you have to work to display your enthusiasm online.

Do: Write your enthusiasm in words, eg “that’s great!” “I am really pleased to hear that!” “What a great opportunity!”

**Responsive facial expressions**

Don’t: assume that you can’t convey any facial expressions online.

Do: use smileys to express your meaning.

Safeguarding procedures online

**Developing Safety Guidelines**

To ensure the safety of all participants in an online mentoring project your online safeguarding strategies must cover the following objectives where applicable:-

1. Protection of participants' privacy and personal information (participants can be service users, volunteers, staff, partners etc.)
2. Screening out people who would abuse or exploit participants or the computer systems they use
3. Preventing opportunities for abuse or exploitation of participants
4. Protection of service users from inappropriate online materials or information
5. Virus prevention and protection

Exercising common sense, adapting existing offline prevention systems to the internet, following statutory safeguarding guidelines and establishing good tracking of volunteer activities and supervision of interactions are always the best online safety measures.

**Establishing a Code of Conduct**

It is helpful to establish and communicate a code of conduct and other guidelines for your project going online. Some suggestions for safety-related areas to cover include:

*Confidentiality* – treatment of emails, text or recorded messages during mentoring conversations; topics of discussion between mentors that are related to their mentoring relationships

*Screening/Background checks* - What checks must be done? What kinds of questions must be answered as part of the screening process, of both potential participants and their references with regards to online safeguarding?

*Inappropriate communications, activities, and emails* – What should a service user do if they receive an inappropriate message? What should a volunteer do if they observe another volunteer, staff person, or service user engaging in illegal or inappropriate online activity? How to treat requests for disclosure of personal information (home address, place of work, phone number, full name, social networking profiles)? Whether informal meetings or home visits are allowed? - Some organisations tell their mentors never to meet anyone in person they have met online, even in conjunction with their online volunteering, except at project-sponsored events.

*Disclosure and escalation procedures* - Everyone should know the procedures when it is necessary to notify someone within your organisation if they encounter inappropriate situations – e.g. if someone violates your codes of conduct, encourages an illegal activity to other participants, or engages in online harassment. Sometimes service users may disclose a situation where they themselves are at risk of harm – e.g. – committing suicide or victims of abuse. It is important that all project participants are clear on the disclosure and escalation procedures that are to be followed in such an instance.

*Data collection and data storage procedures* – Whether service users and volunteers will be required to save or keep a record of all online communications

Managing expectations

* Check-in with participants throughout the programme to offer support.
* Monitor expectations through regular feedback
	+ Are they being met?
	+ Do you need to change anything? (You may need to include “opt out” opportunities)
* Evaluate regularly and share feedback with participants.
* Make sure all participants have your contact details and that there is an “open door” policy. Let people know they can contact you about how it’s going.
* Give suggestions to participants about building rapport.
* Revisit programme boundaries and expectations periodically. Make sure everyone understands these, and that these haven’t drifted because your mentors and mentees are meeting in a different way.
* Check the engagement statistics regularly.
* Regularly review the relationships and re-match as necessary.

Risks during whilst the programme is ongoing:

1. Mentors may find the programme emotional stressful.

**Solutions**: Offer adequate support, for example through phone calls, support groups between mentors.

1. Participants share too much personal information.

**Solution**: Set clear boundaries at the beginning of the programme.

1. Coordinator may fail to review the programme regularly enough.

**Solution**: schedule regular reviews and notify participants of these reviewing schedules.

1. The mentee/service user may disengage during the project which can lead to a lack of trust and loss of reputation to the organisation.

**Solution**: Act on the outcome of the reviews to change the mentor and or project plan to avoid disengagement

Chapter 3: Key Considerations

Questions to ask yourself when moving your service delivery online:

* How do you control who is talking to who?
* What form of online mentoring is most likely to meet the needs of your service users and which delivery model will be the most effective for your project?
* What are the main issues in terms of team/organisational capability and resources that you will need to address in order to deliver the model of online mentoring you are proposing to use? *(consider skills, equipment and finances)*
* Do you need to write a new agreement for Mentors and mentees to agree to new way of working?
* Do you need to check if the time commitments on your mentors or mentees have changed which will make it difficult to maintain their match (i.e they are now looking after their children/other dependents full time)
* Is it more appropriate to shift the match dynamic to a befriending focus for now to maintain the relationship and then go back to focusing on goals?

Chapter 4. Wider Sector Support

SCVO Covid-19 support hub

For further support and advice, the [SCVO Covid-19 Support Hub](https://scvo.org.uk/support/coronavirus/) has a collection of resources, including funders’ statements about the developing situation. SCVO are also collecting the experiences of their members and organisations from across the sector.

This resource hub covers:

* Coronavirus
* Funding
* Employment/HR
* Governance & risk
* Volunteering
* Fundraising
* New service delivery models
* Remote working
* Community Assistance Directory
* Resources

SMN staff members are working from home and can be contacted via email for any further support or questions:

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Bibliography and Other Useful Links:

Health Protection Scotland: <https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/a-to-z-of-topics/covid-19/>

SCVO: <https://scvo.org.uk/support/coronavirus>

Catalyst: <https://medium.com/wethecatalysts/how-to-work-remotely-in-a-time-of-coronavirus-19603e363ec9>

John Fitzgerald’s blog post: [https://medium.com/@johnfitzg/staying-in-touch-while-working-remotely-its-a-people-thing-a6e1360d099d](https://medium.com/%40johnfitzg/staying-in-touch-while-working-remotely-its-a-people-thing-a6e1360d099d)

Mental Health Foundation: <https://mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak/while-working>

GCVS: <http://www.gcvs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Glasgow-Directory-Community-Support-Covid19-V1.0.pdf>

Third Sector Lab and SCVO’s Digital Service Delivery for Charities: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1pgVtqrjT5DvLzyE1F5oltVFdPXtAdJSPmiNcFYvQzFc/edit>

Mind: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

Digital Youth Work Resource: <https://storage.googleapis.com/scvo-cms/media/3548/social-media-youth-worker-guide-branded.pdf>

Association of Adult and Child Online Safety Specialists: <http://aacoss.org/online-safety-support-other-organizations/>