

The demand for mental health and other support services

Below is some feedback from Tamworth Borough Council commissioned/grant funded services Tamworth Advice Centre and Samaritans on how the pandemic has affected their clients particularly around mental health. It also contains additional Information from Voluntary & Community Sector Partner Organisations

Tamworth Advice Centre

The Tamworth Advice Centre (TAC) routinely see clients with mental health issues as many people in crisis tend to have mental health issues. Although they record data of which type of mental health issue someone would have, they don't record how this has been impacted within the pandemic. However, what they can tell us through discussing cases with the team is that they have seen mental health issues in clients increase by 100% during the pandemic; putting more stress, anxiety and strain on their client's mental health.

In addition to general clients seen through the service, The TAC has seen 463 individual clients presenting themselves with issues related to COVID 19 since March 2020.

They recorded a total of 1543 issues related to COVID across these clients which averages out to be approx. 3-4 issues per client. These are as a result of the pandemic and how it has affected those clients. They would normally see clients having one or two issues but through the pandemic have found that clients are presenting with multiple complex issues. This is illustrated in the table below:

Total number of COVID related issues presented March 2020 till February 2021

Type of Issue	Number of issues	Number of clients
Benefits & tax credits	328	93
Benefits Universal Credit	362	75
Consumer goods & services	1	1
Debt	264	33
Discrimination & Hate & GVA	2	2
Education	1	1
Employment	27	14
Financial services & capability	128	53
Health & community care	3	2
Housing	221	59
Legal	3	3
Other	109	55
Relationships & family	15	14
Tax	32	28

Travel & transport	2	2
Utilities & communications	45	28
Grand Total	1543	463

Tamworth Samaritans

The table below shows calls to Tamworth Samaritans during the six month period April to September 2020

	Calls	Emails
April	1130	114
May	1030	129
June	846	125
July	964	146
August	731	127
September	835	143
Total	5536	784

The content of calls and emails received by Tamworth Samaritans is often COVID related or it is an issue magnified by COVID. Many of their callers feel isolated and alone and this has been compounded by the usual services they can access being shut. Samaritans usually get a lot of callers with mental health issues but over the last few months they have had many more.

Increase in calls as follows nationally:

- Financial concerns as a result of reduced income,
- Lack of face to face support for young people who self-harm and for other mental health support needs,
- Reduction in face to face support for people with pre-existing medical conditions,
- Loss of informal community networks and groups,
- Self- isolation.

Additional Information from Voluntary & Community Sector Partner Organisations

Communities Together CIC

See Appendix 2 – Tamworth Social Impact Survey

Foodbank

Tamworth Foodbank has seen an increase of service users since the start of the pandemic. Between March 23rd 2020 and 15th February 2021 they have supported a minimum of 4692 people, that consisted of 3037 adults and 1655 children which is a 30% increase on the same dates in the previous year. They have also supported the School Holiday Project in partnership with Heart of Tamworth and Community Together CIC. They have helped feed over 400 children over two school holidays so far.

The size of the parcels given out is dependent on family size; the larger the family the more food they are given. A typical family of four will receive approximately six bags full of food as well as toiletries.

Tamworth Foodbank were able to be extra generous over Christmas by giving out toys and gifts for the children and adults alongside frozen Christmas hampers. All was possible due to the tremendous generosity from the people and businesses of Tamworth.

Tamworth Foodbank have had to work with a reduced team of volunteers, not only because many are in the older age range and have been shielding/isolating but also to keep the workplace Covid-secure. Intensive risk assessments have been undertaken so all staff and volunteers are safe which has enabled them to remain open and serve the people of Tamworth when they most need it. The volunteers have worked tirelessly week in and week out without fail and without them the Foodbank would not be what it is.

Support Staffordshire

- 156 volunteers came forward to support the pandemic, of which 71 have been placed,
- 20 extra organisations have been supported by the fund to get groups up and running again,
- Every organisation in Tamworth has been phoned at least twice to check they are able to offer support,
- Over £13,000 has been given out to enable organisations to become Covid secure,
- Organisations have been trained in mental health and Covid risk assessments,
- Staff members have been able to be an integral part of the partnership to support and develop the Tamworth community.

Volunteering Statistics

	At mid-term report (11/11/20)	Since mid-term report	Total over 6 months
Registered volunteers	109	47	156
referrals	67	16	83
Placed*	24	45	71
Organisations	11	9	20

*placements confirmed via e-mail or telephone. The actual number is believed to be much higher (roughly double), indicated by conversations with charities, but without confirmation from volunteers.

In the initial lockdown there was a great swell of volunteers and people coming forward who wanted to help during a very difficult time and who had the availability due to being furloughed. As time spent under the pandemic has dragged on there has been a dwindling of willingness or availability for volunteering. In part this is because people started going back to work but it is believed it is the case that as restrictions, social distancing and lockdowns have dragged on there has been an effect on morale, one that has dulled appetites for taking action and the seemingly endless task of trying to keep busy. It is also possible that since the announcement that a vaccine had been approved more people have decided to postpone making plans which might include volunteering.

The final quarter of 2020 saw a steep drop-off in terms of numbers of people looking to volunteer. This was not unexpected as there is always a drop in volunteer registrations during the colder months and as people start to switch to holiday and Christmas mode but in 2020 this trend was significantly more pronounced, for obvious reasons. However, in a way this was a good thing as there were significantly fewer opportunities to offer as many charities are suspending operations and volunteer recruitment. Of the few services that are still taking volunteers, several have reported that they are struggling to cope with the number of referrals.

The future is looking brighter for volunteering. Many of the organisations that have been spoken to are in advanced stages of planning for re-opening and some have restarted recruitment with a view to being able to welcome volunteers in the next few months; pre-registering people so that there is a reduced delay when services recommence.

St. Giles Hospice (Anecdotal Information)

One of the first challenges for St Giles Hospice and their Bereavement Help Point partners was to try and ensure that support continued in the community. The series

of lockdowns had an effect on their ability to continue with the help points, but they adapted their services to operate two online help points, which were open, and still are, to anyone across their catchment area.

When they were able, they opened their Tamworth Bereavement Help Point at Sacred Heart and this has remained open since before Christmas. Numbers are down on usual, but with the easing of restrictions, this may change. However, the lower number of face to face attendees is more than compensated for by the rise in telephone support, which continues to remain high.

It is great testament to the volunteers to have continued to facilitate both the face to face and telephone support sessions each week. There has not, as yet, been a major increase for bereavement support. However, this may change as we come out of lockdown and things return to a new normal. Their Bereavement Support Service for Children and young people was also initially quieter than usual, but is now seeing a rise in referrals.

St Giles were asked by University Hospital of Derby and Burton to facilitate sessions around support for people working through Covid. These sessions were not counselling sessions, but more of a psychological 'first aid' approach in enabling people to talk through their experience of working through the pandemic. They proved very popular, it was decided that St Giles could offer similar free sessions to the staff and volunteers of third sector organisations and their partners. These are available to third sector staff and volunteers across Tamworth area and St Giles can also deliver bespoke sessions to businesses. These sessions can be booked through the St Giles Education website. The focus of the support will be primarily to assist staff and volunteers to process their experiences of working through the Coronavirus pandemic.

Staffordshire Council for Voluntary Youth Service (SCVYS)

'Make Your Mark' is an annual consultation for young people aged 11-18 run by the British Youth Council (BYC) and UK Youth Parliament (UKYP). This year, UK Parliament held a larger role in delivering 'Make Your Mark' and hosted the ballot page on their UK Parliament Week page. Young people vote to determine which issues are most important to them from a shortlist of ten, which have also been determined through a process led by young people.

As young people were asked to provide a postcode as well as their school/youth organisation, there are votes included from schools that are not in the Staffordshire area, where the young people provided their home postcode which was within Staffordshire.

The total turnout of votes is as follows:

<u>Area</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>UK Issues</u>	<u>Local Issues</u>
Staffordshire	600	528	547
Cannock	24	20	23
East Staffs	12	10	11
Lichfield	80	74	69

Newcastle	21	18	21
South Staffs	116	99	112
Stafford	28	26	28
Staffordshire Moorlands	158	146	141
Tamworth	161	135	142

The top issues for Staffordshire are below, with total number of votes cast for each issue. Spoilt ballots are not included.

Staffordshire

UK Issues		Local Issues	
Free University	135	Homelessness	113
Support our Mental Health	127	Domestic Violence	107
Take Action on the climate emergency	68	Access to Training and Jobs	86
Stop Plastic Pollution	62	Young People's Voices	63
Tackle Child Poverty	55	Childhood Obesity and Food Poverty	51
Tackle Discrimination and Hate Crime in the UK	33	Leisure and Culture	50
Increase Racial Awareness in the Curriculum	27	Access to Technology and Broadband for learning	27
Protect Human Rights	21	Transport	26
Votes at 16	0	End the Health Postcode Lottery	24
Include young people in the decision making for the C-19 Recovery	0	Improve Places to Go and Things to Do	0

CHOICES (Anecdotal Information)

CHOICES is experiencing an increase of young people's referrals for mental health interventions.

Children are experiencing demotivation and lack of routine i.e. sleep patterns, and this is having a negative effect on their mental health resulting in an increase of anxiousness and resilience to deal with the changes that are accruing.

Privately, they have had an increase in those parents referring their children, who are not prepared to wait for an intervention, again higher anxiety and stress related issues presenting.

They believe that this is not the tip of the iceberg, as the transition out of this way of being, in their experience will present further social and emotional issues when reintegrating.

Social skills and communication on a face to face basis could present further issues.

Staffordshire County Council – Early Help Team and Safeguarding Team (Anecdotal information)

Specialist Safeguarding Units

Referral rates have been up and down over the pandemic period. However, an increase in young people at the edge of care (parents wanting young people to leave the family home) has been seen which is felt to be as is an impact of COVID and also an increase in young people being referred in due to mental health issues/self-harm. Not attending school or seeing friends due to COVID has impacted on this.

Early Health Teams

Have experienced the following;

- Peaks and drops in referral pace- based on lockdown dates & school closures,
- Referrals have increased overall,
- Some families have been unable to self-manage their needs due to impact of lock down- meaning they may have not had a referral otherwise,
- Increase in mental health referrals- parental and child
- Increase in young people self-harming, anxiety, thoughts of suicide, isolation, sleep problems,
- Virtual support- has worked really well for some but not others, meaning that Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS) has been inaccessible for some young people,
- The 'action for children' contract start clashed with the pandemic in April so links with this service have not yet been established,
- The school closures has had a significant impact on all areas of family life. Parents have all been under extreme pressure not only to home school but to manage 24/7 the difficulties that they may have been having beforehand, as well as trying to keep teenagers at home.

Malachi

In December referrals were up 30% on last year, although there was a decline in referrals during the first lockdown.

Domestic Abuse

Increase in calls to Tamworth Police compared to previous 12 months of 6% (101 calls)

All domestic support services across Staffordshire have seen a 48% rise in all types contact with the services over the eight weeks prior to 31 January 2021 compared to the same period in 2019/20 this includes self-referral, advice to concerned families or general advice.

At the same time, there has been a 31% increase in victim referrals through either self-referral or professional agencies because of domestic abuse disclosure.

This must be countered by the increase in domestic abuse awareness campaigns during lockdown and the new 'ASK ANI' service also offered by pharmacies.

Agencies are coping at this present time (including refuge provision) although face to face services are not yet being undertaken.