



Insight on COVID-19: Support for vulnerable children

Risk assessments

Parents of children with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans told us they've not been contacted by the Royal Borough of Greenwich and, despite Government guidelines, risk assessments are not being completed. As a result, potentially vulnerable children (whose needs can be safely met in an educational environment) have not been given access to attend school.

Parents of vulnerable children without an EHC plan told us there is no way for them to register a vulnerable child. As a result, some children who most need to be in school at this time are unable to gain access.



Care packages

Families of children with additional needs are struggling. Care packages have ceased, respite care is not available, and they can't get help from extended family due to lockdown and social distancing. Children are finding it hard to adjust to the sudden change in routine. Some families have seen an increase in challenging behaviour and parents are finding it difficult to manage this alone, without support or advice. This is particularly hard for single parents of children with additional needs.



Access to digital devices and the internet



As a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, support and services have shifted online, but not everyone has access to digital devices or the internet. Women escaping domestic violence living in temporary accommodation often don't have internet access, making it difficult to access support and services. Victims of domestic violence who don't speak English as a first language face a dual barrier, to find services without internet access, and to understand information provided.

Many families caring for children with additional needs don't have access to digital devices or the internet. Parents with uncertain immigration status tell us they're not receiving support to access digital devices. In addition, some parents of children with additional needs, simply don't have the confidence, or knowledge, to home-school and are worried their children are falling behind.

Parents are confused over who is, and who is not, eligible to receive digital devices or how to apply.

The 'new' normal

Some schools offer online support for children with additional needs such as virtual speech therapy and packs of tailored lessons and activities, others offer little.

We were told information and support from schools and the council has been patchy and inconsistent, particularly for parents caring for children with additional needs and for families who do not speak English as a first language.



Available support



Groups and organisations offering support to families and children with additional needs are struggling. Some have ceased operating altogether and are concerned about their ability to resume activity once the pandemic is over. Other groups and organisations continue to operate, offering a reduced range of support. Both staff and volunteers are concerned that families with vulnerable children are not receiving the help they need.

Many support groups rely on volunteers, some of whom are in 'at risk' groups who are unlikely to resume the help they offer for many months to come, if ever. Without new volunteers, the survival of some groups is in question.



Thank You

A big thank you to staff and volunteers at the Clockhouse Community Centre. Both individuals who've received help from Clockhouse, and groups signposting to services at Clockhouse, told us how great they've been.





How we collect feedback

We collect feedback in a variety of ways, including; calls from individuals who come to us for information, signposting and support, zoom calls with specific groups of service users, contact with peer-led patient groups, information from support groups run by charities or community groups, and intelligence shared by local mutual aid groups, and our volunteers. **The feedback in this briefing is based on experience shared by 5 groups, their staff, volunteers, members and service users, including:**

HER Centre

FLAG (Families Living with Autism in Greenwich)

Greenwich Downs Group

HALO (Handicapped Activities and Leisure Organisation)

Brookhill Children's Centre

You can contact us via phone: **07903 685 533**, by email 'info@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk', you can join our weekly information, signposting and support sessions every Wednesday and Friday or, for care home residents, and relatives and friends of residents, you can join our **monthly Care Home Zoom meetings**. Email info@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk for the login and password to access our sessions.



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