



**healthwatch**  
Bexley

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## **Review of Mind in Bexley's Wellbeing Line**

August 2020

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## Executive Summary

### What did we find out?

The Wellbeing Line was very well received by callers, the majority of whom were happy with the help and support offered and the chance to talk during lockdown and social distancing.

It has proved to be invaluable to callers who did not know where to turn to, to get the help and support they needed.

The Coronavirus pandemic has negatively impacted on Wellbeing Line caller's mental health and wellbeing.

The Wellbeing Line is not a Crisis Line but is increasingly helping callers with higher more complex needs.

## Recommendations

The Wellbeing Line has proven to be overwhelmingly beneficial and well received by callers during the early months of the Coronavirus pandemic and as the service continues to be accessed by high numbers of callers the Wellbeing Line should be reviewed in the next 6 months by Mind, the Local Authority, Oxleas and Bexley Clinical Commissioning Group to establish the following:-

If there is a need for the Wellbeing Line, taking into consideration the increasing complexity and higher needs of callers and the Crisis service already provided by the existing Oxleas Crisis Line?

Due to the continued pressures and restrictions on local residents' lives as they live with Covid-19. What would be the impact on local residents if the Wellbeing Line is closed?

The increasing complexity and multiple needs of callers should be explored to see how the service can be supported by and link better to the Crisis service already provided by Oxleas Crisis Line.

Additional funding, including grant and charitable funding should be explored to support the service, as without additional funding the Wellbeing Line may not be viable or sustainable.

The support and supervision available from Oxleas for Wellbeing Line volunteers should be explored to ensure those volunteering on the Wellbeing Line are able to access help if they need it.

## Introduction

In March 2020 because of the Coronavirus pandemic, Mind in Bexley (Mind) staff moved out of the office in Bexleyheath and began working remotely. The Government introduced lockdown measures to restrict the spread of the Coronavirus and Government guidance restricted the type of services that could be offered by Mind. Mind acted quickly to support their service users by introducing an

extensive range of virtual groups and telephone support. The Crisis Café run by Mind in Bexleyheath stayed open with restrictions to support those in crisis who may be in need help during this difficult time.

At this unprecedented and stressful time, Mind anticipated the potential increased need to offer support for those who were either unable to access their normal services or had not needed help and advice about their wellbeing before this challenging time. As many local services introduced online and more digital services, Mind recognised that to prevent people from being digitally excluded extra support was needed in the form of a phone line. As a result, on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 the Mind in Bexley Wellbeing Line opened.

The Wellbeing Line is manned by Mind in Bexley staff who volunteered to answer calls in addition to undertaking their regular role. They should be commended and recognised for the additional work they have undertaken at this difficult time, especially as they themselves are adapting to new ways of working and living with Covid-19. Support, training and supervision for Wellbeing Line volunteers is currently provided by Mind in Bexley. The Line is open from 9-5pm Monday to Friday.

The aim of the Wellbeing Line is to offer reassurance, support and advice to those struggling with their mental health at this difficult time. Due to Coronavirus many local services adapted and changed. New local services were set up to offer support and help. The Wellbeing Line not only ensures that people are given support to access mental health services such as those offered by Mind, callers are also given information, depending on individual needs, about local services such as Mutual Aid Groups, the Local Authority Coronavirus Helpline and food banks.

The Wellbeing Line is not a Crisis Support Line. An established Crisis Line offering support for those in crisis is offered by Oxleas NHS Trust.

Between April 1<sup>st</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020, the Wellbeing Line received 216 calls. The aim of this report is to find out about the experiences of Wellbeing Line callers and establish if the call was considered helpful.

The Wellbeing Line continues to be busy and the nature of the calls has become more challenging, including callers with high levels of need, with many callers being in crisis and needing more specialist help and advice.

## Methodology

Healthwatch Bexley (Healthwatch) were provided with a list of 43 people by Mind, who had called the Wellbeing Line between April 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> June 2020 and had given verbal consent for Healthwatch to contact them. We were able to speak to 32 of the 43 people on the list. Those who we were unable to contact were called three times, but due to the private nature of their call to the Wellbeing Line, we did not feel it appropriate to leave a message.

A list of questions was produced with the help of Mind but rather than a questionnaire, this was used as a guide during conversations and as a result not all questions were answered by all we spoke to. We wanted to get rich qualitative feedback about experiences rather than restrictive quantitative data. However, qualitative data and the number of responses to guided questions is included.

All the information collected was collated and the information compiled to produce this report during August 2020. The report was produced by a member of the Healthwatch Bexley team.

## Wellbeing Line Responses

### 1. How did you hear about the Mind in Bexley Wellbeing Line? (n32)

The Wellbeing Line callers we spoke to had heard about the line via a variety of sources. 4 via social media, 7 from Mind in Bexley either through the website or support they already access, 7 from their GP and 14 had heard about it by other methods such as a friends, relatives, a nurse, the police.

*"I knew about Mind from past experience so saw number on a website and called"*

*"I called the GP and my GP referred me to Mind and Respect, he gave me two numbers and it must have been Mind that I called."*

*"Bexley Isolation Group gave the number"*

### 2. Have you called a helpline before about your wellbeing? (n31)

Approximately 50% of the callers, told us they had called a helpline in the past.

### 3. If yes, which helpline have you called? (n15)

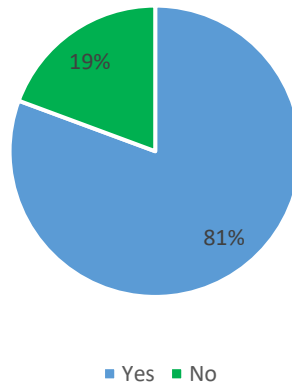
Callers told us they had called the following helplines:

- *Oxleas-Crisis Line*
- *Domestic Violence Line (name unknown)*
- *GP*
- *Samaritans*
- *MIND*
- *Family Matters*
- *Crisis Café*
- *School Counselling*
- *Work Based Counselling*

### 4. Have you accessed support from services such as Mind before? (n32)

88% (28) of callers had previously accessed support for their mental health and wellbeing from services such as Mind.

### Have you accessed support from services such as Mind before? (n31)



#### If yes which services?

The following services had been used by callers in the past:

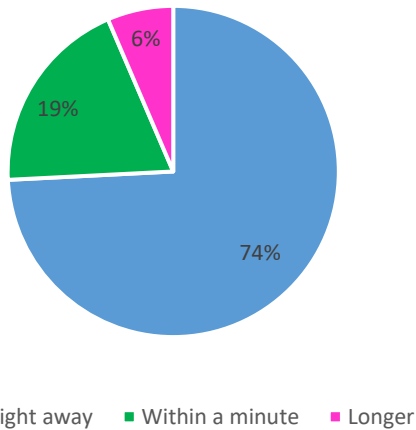
Mind, Recovery College, Crisis Café, Support Groups, Carers Support, CBT, IAPT, Oxleas, Oxleas - the Community Mental Health, the Home Treatment Team, Employment Services, Counselling, Relaxation and Talking Therapies.



#### 5. How quickly was your call answered? (n31)

Most callers 74% (23) had their call answered straight away. Callers who left a message at the weekend or in the evening were happy with the time it took for them to receive a call back.

### How quickly was your call answered? (n31)



*"Called on a Saturday as I thought the line was 24 hours including weekend."*

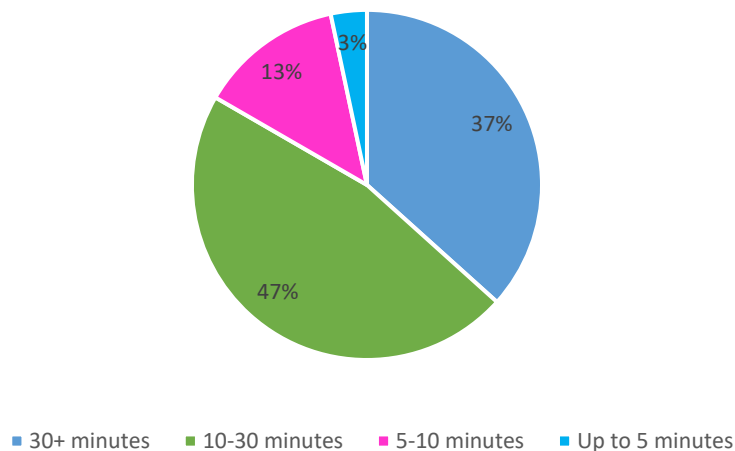
*"I left a message and then called Oxleas Crisis Line who helped me through it. On Monday Mind called me back"*

*"Tried to call the Samaritans before the wellbeing line but just could not get through. Was incredibly surprised when someone answered the phone so quickly."*

### 6. Approximately how long did your call last? (n30)

47% of calls lasted between 10-30 minutes and 37% of calls lasted over 30 minutes.

### Length of your call (n30)



## 7. Why did you call the Wellbeing Line? (n32)

Reasons given for calling the line included, feeling suicidal, low mood, depression, stress, worry, anger, anxiety, wanting information or advice, needing to talk, looking for help, divorce, bereavement, lockdown concerns, the impact of Covid19, benefit help, struggling to cope, money worries and loneliness.



*"Called as my mental state got a lot worse and felt I **couldn't cope with life**; my **anxiety** was through the roof."*

*"I called because I suffer from **depression** and I felt **suicidal** and to be honest it's all a bit of a blur."*

*"I needed help as **struggling** due to lockdown. It was all a bit much at the time and I wanted to **talk**. I needed **information**-help but mostly to talk."*

*"I was at **breaking point** wanted info about a form (benefits). Had been **bottling things up** for years anyway and things just came out when I called and started talking."*

*"I felt **suicidal** my mood goes up and down and changes worse than the weather. I was feeling low and needed **medication**. I lost my mum 2 years ago and it sent me on a **downward spiral**. Sorted myself out a bit now. Have not dealt with losing my mum and with Covid19, I don't deal with change very well. I am still trying to adjust without my mum, it's been two years and I still expect her to walk round the corner. I was her carer for 17 years and when I did manage to get help, they ballsed it up, she fell and ended up in hospital as they didn't do their job properly and she died. I am **under Oxleas** but I got bored with all the things they tell you to do and don't get round to doing them. I got discharged then go back and get discharged again it's a **viscous circle**. I don't always help myself to tell you the truth. They get you to talk about drugs and it just makes you want to go out and do it."*

*"My son is **autistic** and has been **suicidal** trying to cope with false allegations made against him. I needed advice about help for him and me. I was finding it hard to cope as his **carer**. My son is going through quite a bit, he's in **crisis** now. I needed help as well, it's hard trying to keep things together."*



*"I was struggling with **low mood** and **struggling** with things at home. If hadn't called the Wellbeing Line I would probably have called Oxleas Crisis Line. I wasn't sure what to expect when I called ...probably just to **talk to someone.**"*

*"I had a heart attack and the nurse gave me the number as I was feeling a **bit depressed**. I'm **struggling financially** as my employer is only giving me statutory sick pay."*

*"Just have **anxiety** issues through work and meetings I have to do. I work in engineering and office is in London. Been working all through coronavirus outbreak. My uncle had the same thing when he was my age. He had a few sessions and it sorted him out. I just wanted the same so it's not an issue for work. I just wanted a **referral** to get some help maybe a few therapy sessions. Wanted someone to **talk to and advice.**"*

*"GP was most concerned about me. I had been put on tablets that made me ill hallucinations and nightmares. I had no anxiety or depression as such. I've been **lonely** since lockdown as my GP doesn't have time to talk, but they treat me kindly. Have been under Oxleas in the past but there's nothing wrong with me. Just finding it **hard to cope** now **I'm very lonely** all the help I normally have has stopped."*

*"Called as I've been on waiting list for mind for long time and because of Corona was given phone counselling appointment but. I missed the first phone call. I was worried and **upset** that they might think I didn't want it. It really upset me. I wanted to make sure that they were going to call me back I was **desperate to talk** to someone and get help and was probably a bit over sensitive about it. I really needed to chat to someone. I wanted to make sure someone would call me back. I was also worried that phone calls might not be the best option for me (for counselling) straight off I felt it might not be easy so wanted **advice** on my options."*

*"Called to help with my anger issues and **anger** and **anxiety** and was feeling depressed."*

*"I am going through an **acrimonious divorce** and was feeling terrible. Needed someone to talk to."*

*"I called because I wanted to speak to Mind. I felt **worn down** as was being tested for **cancer.**"*

*"Suffers from extreme social anxiety which means he is incapable of working. Lives on his own in a block of six flats. Called the line as he felt he **needed social contact**. Would get up in the morning **worrying** thinking "**Oh my god it's covid-19 what are we going to do**". He has good neighbours. Lives near a supermarket and was able to go out and get food without having to ask for assistance from neighbours or volunteers."*

*"My **mood** was going high which was unusual as it usually goes low, it's not a common feature of my mental health. I had spoken to the Urgent Advice Line for Bexley who told me to have a hot chocolate and go to bed. I called the wellbeing line out of **desperation** as she felt she was not getting anywhere with the other help line."*

*"Suffer from depression and **recently retired**. I was becoming very **overwhelmed** by the Covid situation. Just needed someone to **talk** to."*

#### **8. What did you expect when you called the Wellbeing Line? (n30)**

Over half of callers provided more than one answer to this question. 93% of callers wanted to talk to someone, 60% wanted help and advice and 47% expected help to find appropriate services to meet their needs (signposting).

#### **9. Did the call meet your expectations and would you recommend the Wellbeing Line? (n30)**

93% (n28) of callers told us the call met their expectations. However, ten people also told us that they hadn't really known what to expect from the call. Only two callers felt the call had not fully met their expectations. Over half of callers would recommend the Wellbeing Line and call again if they needed to.

*"The call **exceeded my expectations**. I would recommend the Wellbeing Line as there are **professionals** at the end of the phone that can give advice and **stop a crisis** occurring."*

*"The call calmed me down. I **would recommend** the Wellbeing Line. I do think it helped and would call again if I thought I needed to."*

*"I was given positives to think about and would recommend the Wellbeing Line. Although it didn't help me directly with my financial problems it did give me some help and **might help others more**."*

*"I would recommend the Wellbeing Line and Mind; they **listen and understand**. I would call them again if needed to, but I haven't needed to as they (Mind) call me regularly."*

*"**Didn't really help** how I felt but it helped to know they were trying to sort out getting my meds with Erith Hospital. I had **no GP** at the time, so they helped with that. I would recommend the helpline and call again. The person I spoke to was lovely understanding and easy to talk to."*

*"I did not know what to expect when making the call but just having someone **listen** to me and **not patronise was good**."*

*"The call **exceeded my expectations**. I thought that the line would just be manned by volunteers and could not believe I got through to a **professional** so quickly."*

*"Could be improved if there's a contact you could call or drop an email to, so you could speak to the same person rather than having to repeat yourself to different people. Like a mentor..." (Has called the line more than once).*

#### **10. How did you feel after your call? (n31)**

*"It was all really good in fact I would go as far as to say it **saved my life** that day and I'm not being over dramatic. I hadn't spoken or confided in anyone for a long time. Lucky, I called that*

line as things got set in motion, I'm not 100% now but am different from when I called 2 months ago. My mum is pleased I called and now get help. It was strange as just talking I got things off my chest, it was a weight off my shoulders. I Felt like I had someone to talk to without judgement was a real release just talking. Funny because there was no real change but speaking helped me. It was good they have all been professional, patient, kind, no judgement and its confidential. I knew it wouldn't get back to anyone. A few days after when I processed it all I felt optimistic."

"**Good to talk** to someone, was able to rationalise it all a bit. Happy with the call she was very understanding which made me feel much better."

"I felt it was **pointless** I didn't get what wanted. I had something else in mind when I called which I didn't get so it wasn't what I expected. I expected more like a counselling session just to talk. Would have been better if they went through stuff with me rather than just sending me an email."

"I wanted help with finances. I was **given helpful advice** but ended up no better off financially. I was given positives to think about and would recommend the Wellbeing Line. Although it didn't help me directly with my financial problems it did give me some help and might help others more."

"I remember feeling satisfied after the call -what can someone do, it was all alien, but I felt **reassured** to talk."

"A **relief** like a load had been lifted that I had someone to talk to and help."

"The lady was very **reassuring** a genuinely nice lady everyone has been very nice and really helpful. I felt like I was supported straight away it was particularly good. I feel **confident** that someone is there to help now."

"The lady was exceedingly kind, soft and gentle on the phone which **calmed me down**. I was very anxious at the time. She was extremely helpful."

"After, honestly, I felt much better, felt like I **wasn't alone** that there was someone to talk to. The lady was really friendly helpful and supportive."

"She was so helpful. I felt **complete** and **satisfied** after the call. Just speaking to someone had taken away all my feelings of isolation and loneliness."

"Felt **calmer** having **vented my frustration**. I was angry with the Urgent Advice Line for Bexley. Having rang the Wellbeing line I **felt listened to, understood** and **not rushed**. They had plenty of **time** to spend with me. The person I spoke to had a good tone of voice, was very understanding. felt my **needs were met**."

"Still felt very **emotional** and upset but a lot **calmer**.....felt able to cope until the Friday call happened."

## 11. What support and advice were you given? (n30)

*"Told I would be called by people who could help and given numbers of different support. Imogen called back at least twice to offer help and tell me what was happening. She asked if it was ok for someone to call me. She put me in contact with Julia to help with the form and someone to talk to regularly. Imogen gave lots of numbers: **support line/ men's help line/ counsellor line/ crisis line/ crisis café.**"*

*"Initially I called for my son who was finding it hard to cope. I was advised to get my son to call the line himself when he felt ready to. He has since called the Wellbeing Line and has been to the **Crisis Cafe**. I was advised to call **A & E** if either my son or I felt suicidal. We discussed me getting counselling to help me cope to which I agreed to."*

*"Advised to call **Isolation Bexley** to help with getting food. They have been extremely helpful and are still helping me."*

*"Was advised to contact **social services** but I'm not entitled to any help, only statutory sick pay of about £90 a week. My outgoings are £2000 a month so I'm having to use my life savings. I'm watching them disappear."*

*"I was told I could go to the walk-in place in Bexleyheath (**Crisis Cafe**) and self-refer into **Mind**. I will still go to Bexleyheath and call Mind but too busy currently working in London."*

*"To contact **family wellbeing and counselling.**"*

*"When they called me back, they gave me a choice of daily or **weekly calls**. They call weekly to make sure I'm ok, they've got a lady I already know, she calls me. They told me about the **Crisis Cafe** if need help urgently but I'm too scared to go out because of the virus now. I don't go out anyway, I get scared and feel vulnerable about going out any way but don't feel I can go out now."*

*"Discussed options and advised to call my **doctor** or self-refer into **Kent Mind**. Was told about **Crisis Cafe** in Bexleyheath if I needed to go."*

*"Was offered **counselling** and thought about it but decided against it. She suggested I try different things to see what suits me. Mind called me back within two hours and talked to me about what was available. I did some zoom stuff. I don't mind zoom and telephone contact it doesn't put me off I prefer it really. I think it's because it's the lazy thing to do, less travel and you can be more open."*

*"My call was answered by Sue. She was **brilliant**, she **listened** and although not a computer specialist she had heard of the problem I was experiencing. She told me a couple of things to try. I felt such relief, I thought I was going mad not being able to do something so simple. Sue*

listened to me. **"I don't think Sue who I spoke to realises how valuable that call was for me."**

*"The person I spoke to was **fantastic**... they had exactly the right training to help. They were professional and knowledgeable. They were able to help me with some **coping mechanisms** that really helped with the hysteria of the situation."*

## **12. Were you referred to other services? (n28)**

61% (17) of callers were referred to other services, 36% were not referred to other services generally because they were already accessing services such as Mind, Oxleas or Carers Support.

## **13. Which services were you referred to and have you engaged with them yet? (n31)**

Callers were referred services and support which included:- Mind in Bexley or Kent, Recovery College, Crisis Café (Bexleyheath), IAPT, Counselling, A & E, the GP, Oxleas, Social Services, the London Borough of Bexley's Coronavirus Helpline, Community Groups, Bereavement Services and local Mutual Aid Groups.

81% of callers referred to other services had engaged with them, mostly by telephone. The reasons given for not yet engaging included, returning to work, being too busy, not wanting to go out and 2 callers were waiting to be contacted.

*"**Crisis Cafe** if need it (may go when isolation rules relaxed a bit). Trying to remember what else...not sure if been referred as such, but regularly called on Monday morning from Patrick from outreach he's in training for **talking therapy**. I needed help as struggling due to lock down. It was all a bit much at the time and I wanted to talk. Patrick calls every Monday morning. He's not pushy and goes through different stuff, he's patient and particularly good. I have a **care plan** now; I didn't have structure but do now. Its good as it gives me purpose and pushes me. It's all going along good at the moment, so fingers crossed. Julia helped with form filling that had to be done online and as the library was closed, I couldn't do it as I've got no internet."*

*"Over last couple days now, seen **GP** for anxiety. Been supported by **Mind Carers Support** for a long time because of caring for my son. Agreed to **Mind counselling services**."*

*"Not been referred anywhere...already have befrienders (2), from **Crossroads** and **Evergreen**, I talk to **Irish Community Services** and used to go to the library. Befrienders ring me now and my daughter comes round but can't come in as have to be careful."*

*"Wasn't referred as I already have counselling. I paid to go private with Counselling Matters but couldn't get hold of them. **Mind** have called me back a couple of times since my call (to Wellbeing Line) the first call was over one and a half hours. It's really helped me."*

*"The man we spoke to was absolutely lovely. He works with carers and told us everything we needed to know and put us in touch with another lady from **Mind**. He was a pleasure to talk to"*

and let us talk if we needed. It was good to unload and be listened to by someone who understands. It was great he was there...like there is someone to help. It felt like we are not alone can't thank him enough."

"**Crisis Cafe** if need it and **counselling**. Someone called and suggested a **Silvercloud C19** module. I did it and was really pleased with it. **Mind** couldn't do enough for me, a lady contacted me every week either by phone or email. She was really good, gave me support and confidence."

"Was told about **Crisis Cafe** in Bexleyheath if I needed to go. Told to contact my **GP** and **Mind in Kent** and go to **A&E** if I needed to."

"Was referred to **Crisis Café** and **Recovery College**. I didn't know how to use Zoom but learnt and tried a Recovery College Zoom group but didn't feel comfortable at the time. It was a bit overwhelming as everyone could see each other and I wasn't in the right place for that at the time, to see them and be chatting. It was not what I needed so I said I was sorry and not ready but may come back later."

"**Isolation Help Bexley**"

"**Crisis Cafe Mind** contacted me and I got regular phone calls. Had advice on **benefits** and **employment services**. I've finished counselling now. Face to face is better really for me but phone calls were more convenient once I went back to work. I feel ok now."

"**MIND** have tried to call a number of times, but I keep missing the calls. I have also looked into an **art therapy group** and they told me there may be a new group starting on Thursday 30th July."

"As suggested, I called my doctor back who referred me to **Mind in Kent**. Mind in Kent called me and I now have regular phone calls from them. I'm under the **Mental Health Team** and they have changed my medication which has helped. I feel face to face contact is better for me as I have a little boy and often find it hard to talk on the phone."

"I was offered a weekly phone call from **Mind**. Within two days someone called to arrange a suitable day for this to happen and so far, I've had two calls.... not sure if I will carry on with the calls as I want to see someone face to face. I was also offered online **CBT** but again would rather see someone or go to a group for this. Was told about the **Crisis Cafe** but would only use this if I felt suicidal."

## Case Studies

### Case Study A

A is a 21-year-old female who called the Wellbeing Line about two months ago because she was struggling to cope. She was living and working abroad, but because of Coronavirus had to return home and live with her parent's whom she doesn't get on with. A is under the care of her GP, being prescribed Serotonin for anxiety and depression. She is concerned because she had started to experience symptoms of an old eating disorder she had in the past.

A remembers calling a helpline in 2017 but couldn't remember which one. Having been referred to Mind previously, A looked at their website and saw the Wellbeing Line phone number. She called in the evening and left a message and was pleased to be called back the following morning. The call lasted over 45 minutes. She expected a bit of advice and help and after the call she described feeling slightly different. A discussed what options were available to her and was referred into Mind.

Mind called her quickly and at her initial assessment online counselling was offered. She turned this down as she doesn't want online stuff and chose to have counselling by telephone. A was also told about the Crisis Café but hasn't used it as she was too scared to leave her house. She would recommend the Wellbeing Line to others as she had a good experience and found it helped her. She told us:

*"It's not me, if I'm in a bad zone, which can last 1-2 weeks, I am not motivated. I don't even want to talk to friends. The last thing I'm going to do is go on my laptop. But if I have a telephone call, I will always answer the phone, I can't not answer it."*

*"All those I've spoken to; two ladies and a man have been really nice and understanding. I had an unscheduled call which felt particularly good, it felt like they were thinking about me and cared. It's all been mentally exhausting but in a good way."*

*"I haven't used the Crisis Café yet as I'm struggling to get out of the house, so therefore it's difficult to get there. Think I would be too embarrassed to go there as well."*

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### Case Study B

B is paying a private counsellor but was unable to contact her counsellor during Coronavirus lockdown and as a result she looked to get help elsewhere. She had not called a helpline before but has accessed Mind services in the past. She heard about the Mind Wellbeing Line as she called Minds number and it was on their answer phone message.

During lockdown she was starting to get stressed about going out if she needed to. She has high functioning autism and said everything was starting to freak her out. She considers herself to normally be a very independent person who doesn't like to rely on others but told us she had gone into 'hermit panic mode'. B is not sure what she expected of the call, but just knew she needed someone to talk to and listen to her. She was too scared to go out and her independence and reluctance to rely on others prevented her from asking for help.

After the call B described feeling a lot calmer by just having talked and been listened to. She described the person at the end of the phone as a 'sounding board' who understood and didn't judge. She said they reassured her and told her it was OK to accept help if she needed it. That if people are happy to shop for her so she didn't have to go out, to let them do it. They also told her it was ok to wait until things had calmed down and were more back to normal before going out, which reassured her that she didn't have to go out.

As B is having private counselling which she is happy with, she does not think she has been referred to any Mind services. However, she said Mind have called her back a couple of times since her initial call to the Wellbeing Line which she feels has really helped her, saying "It was all exceptionally good."

She would recommend the line telling us:

*"It came in handy for me. I act like 'Chicken Little' when the sky's falling in, it's good for people like me to have someone to listen and calm me down."*

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### **Case Study C**

C's mum has OCD and other problems after having a brain aneurism several years ago. With lockdown C told us her mum had got much worse, checking the taps are off, making sure the fridge is closed, she even wakes C's dad in the night to check the fridge. With increasing pressure, concerns and stress levels during Coronavirus, the family realised they couldn't cope on their own and needed to get help. They were unsure where to get help or who to contact. When C called the Wellbeing Line the call was answered straight away. C was able to talk for over 30 minutes. She expected advice to be sign posted to services and be listened to. C's mum was referred to Mind and the family would highly recommend the line to others. They were pleased with the support they received describing the person who answered their call as "*lovely man who really helped us.*"

*"The man we spoke to was absolutely lovely. He works with carers and told us everything we needed to know and put us in touch with another lady from Mind. He was a pleasure to talk to and let us talk if we needed. It was good to unload and be listened to by someone who understands. It was great he was there...like there is someone to help. It felt like we were not alone. I can't thank him enough. After, it was a relief like a load had been lifted that we had someone to talk to and help."*

*"A lady called mum from Mind to triage her, but mum found her accent hard to understand. She was friendly and arranged for someone else to call. I think they specialised in OCD. Because of mum's condition, she finds it hard to communicate on the phone. The lady from Mind decided that mum needed face to face as she didn't think an hour's telephone consultation would work for mum. Mums hearing is not brilliant and sometimes it's hard to understand what mum says, she finds it hard to express herself. We know we must wait for an appointment and totally understand the situation. Everyone has been so helpful; we can't thank them enough."*

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### Case Study D

D called the line as she was concerned about her elderly parents, both 70 years of age, who both contracted Coronavirus. New restrictions introduced during lockdown made it impossible for D's mum or any other family member to visit her husband when he was admitted to hospital after contracting Coronavirus.

*"Basically, both mum and dad had Coronavirus. The day before lockdown, my dad was taken to hospital by ambulance and mum couldn't go with him. They are both 70 and were scared, it was a shock to see her husband taken away like that. Mum is disabled and was showing signs of having a breakdown. It was early days, confusing and no one knew what was going on. It was the first-time mums been like this and the GP wasn't taking mum seriously just saying it will pass. Mum was showing signs of having a breakdown, dad was in hospital and I was trying to get mum help and cope with the situation myself. My sister's mother in law recommended I call Mind as she has used them before. I was told to go back to mums GP, or I think to contact Oxleas if the GP wouldn't help. I remember feeling satisfied after the call -what can someone do, it was all alien, but I felt reassured to talk. The GP took notice after several e-consults and we talked to an understanding GP at Crook Log, who got mum the help and medication she needed. Dad is home and mum is improving. I was also called several times by Minds Carers support who helped me and listened to me, Andy, I missed his last call as I am back at work now. The Wellbeing Line is an option to call where someone offers empathy and practical advice in a horrible situation. They offered reassurance to talk despite everything going on. I would recommend it; it was early days when I called the Wellbeing Line no one knew what was going on with Coronavirus it was a scary time"*

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### Case Study E

E is a 54-year-old lady who lives with her son and husband, who works nights. During lockdown she was worried about Coronavirus and her son leaving home to live with his girlfriend. She was also concerned about her dad whom she is a carer for, feeling anxious and worried that she would not be able to visit him during lockdown. She described it as an incredibly stressful time but that she was helped to realise that it wasn't the virus that she was worried about, but her son going away and her dad. Once she was helped to deal with that, she felt ok.

E recognised that she needed someone to talk to and contacted her GP. The GP prescribed medication and suggested that she call Mind for counselling. She described how she had had depression in the past and although worried about the stigma associated with mental ill health didn't want things to get out of hand. She remembers being very tearful when she called the line as she bottles things up.

She had expected to be put on a list for counselling and didn't expect to get help straight away. E was pleased the GP recommended Mind as they have been marvellous because she got so much help and support. After Healthwatch called E she contacted us with the following:

*"I am writing my views for you about the help and support I have had the last few months. I initially contacted Mind after talking to my GP who was helping me with anxiety and low mood. She gave me Bexley Minds number and said it would be worth trying as I may get counselling or support quicker."*

*I phoned the support network (Wellbeing Line) and a very nice lady answered who was so good at listening and understanding my situation, very kind, sympathetic and said they would do what they could to help as quickly as they could."*

*"She also said there was a cafe in Bexleyheath, run by Mind, I could go to if I needed more help while I waited for someone to ring back. This lady phoned back within a few days and went through the support they provided and counselled me on the phone to try to understand the right course of support I needed. I felt so much better even after this call."*

*"I felt more confident that I could get through this and that people understood my problems. Mind referred me to an online course called Silvercloud. I had a supporter, who I could contact anytime by email and once a week she rang me or emailed her response to my input into the course and how she thought I was doing. The course was so helpful, I began to get stronger each week and she even put an extra module about Coronavirus which had tools to help me cope with some of the fears I had."*

*"I have finished this course but have the modules for a year which include relaxation, ways to cope with mood by writing things down in a chart and lots of exercises to help. I would definitely recommend Mind to anyone who was needing support and to feel more confident they can get through a bad time with so much help and support."*

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### **Case Study F**

F is a 22 year old man who called the Wellbeing Line as he experiences anger issues, anxiety and depression, which were made worse because of lockdown. He called his GP initially and they referred him to Mind and Respect. F had no previous experience of calling a helpline or using mental health services and called expecting to get help and advice regarding what is available. His call was answered quickly and he spoke to someone for 5 to 10 minutes, although it may have been longer, he can't recall 100%.

F wanted to find some therapy or something to help with his issues. He said during the call he was asked questions on a scale of 1-10 how he felt. He also discussed his smoking habits and admitted smoking weed 3 times a day but said he did not use other drugs. He was advised to try to cut down and see how it goes. He took the advice which helped and he said he became less angry. He found being able to talk really helped but wasn't able to recall the other advice he was given.

F is not sure if he was referred to any services but has been receiving regular calls from Mind so assumes he was referred for counselling. Unfortunately, after his call to the Wellbeing Line his circumstances changed and he now feels he has regressed, his smoking and anger issues are worse now. His mum died from a pre-existing lung condition (not Covid related) and he describes his anger as bad now. He knew she was dying but wasn't allowed to visit her by family because of his anger issues which upset his mum.

He has now moved out of the area and is staying with friends in the Midlands. F agreed that he would call the Wellbeing Line again when he returns to the area or contact the local Mind where he is. He also agreed to contact a bereavement helpline to help him cope with his mum's death.

## Conclusion

The Wellbeing Line was rapidly set up by Mind in response to the Coronavirus pandemic and caller's feedback shows that it has proved to be an invaluable resource for those in need of support in these difficult times. Callers were unsure where to go to or who to ask for help as existing support such as GP practices closed or adapted services to operate under strict government Coronavirus guidelines. Emergency Coronavirus help such as shopping and food delivery were set up by organisations such as mutual aid groups, community groups, charities and the local authority. The Wellbeing Line helped to direct people to this emergency help. The Wellbeing Line was really appreciated by those who did not have access to services or information digitally, who may otherwise have been digitally excluded from accessing the help and services they needed.

The report demonstrates that the Wellbeing Line team were effective in identifying caller's needs and if appropriate, referring or directing callers to services, including mental health services such as the Crisis Café or counselling to help them to cope. One caller said the Wellbeing Line had **"saved my life"** while others told us they were at **"breaking point"** when they called, but felt much better afterwards, even though they may have simply been allowed to talk and be listened too. Callers told us they felt increasingly **"isolated"** which was impacting on their mental health and wellbeing. They appreciated being able to talk to someone and learn about the help available to them.

The report found that both callers who had previously accessed help for mental ill health and those who had never sought help before Coronavirus, reached out to the Wellbeing Line for help, advice support or just to talk. Some callers had previously had treatment for their mental health and found conditions such as anxiety, depression and eating disorders resurfaced or became out of control at this difficult time, others who were already accessing mental health services felt overwhelmed and isolated. The Wellbeing Line gave them the extra support they needed as they struggled to cope with lockdown and social distancing.

During lockdown callers rang the line for a variety of reasons from loneliness and a need to talk to those who were feeling suicidal. Mind have told us that the level of risk and complexity of calls has increased as the line has become more established and the threat of Coronavirus and restrictions to daily life remain with us.

The Mind Wellbeing team should be commended for the praise and positive comments we received from callers when we spoke to them about their Wellbeing Line call. This is demonstrated by a selection of these comments in the report. The Wellbeing team sometimes had to deal with callers with complex issues and high risk. They were described as professional, understanding, non-judgemental and good listeners, sometimes calling back callers with additional information or to check they were ok.

The small team of staff who volunteered to man the line, undertook this role alongside their normal duties. With the popularity of the line and over 84% of calls lasting over 10 minutes, 37% of which lasted over 30 minutes, this is a big-time commitment for the Mind team who man the line. The line may not be sustainable without additional funding for a dedicated team of staff, to allow the existing Wellbeing team to concentrate on their existing roles within Mind.

Oxleas NHS Trust are funded to provide a Crisis Line service for Bexley Borough. The Wellbeing Line was set up to offer support and advice during the Coronavirus pandemic and although not a Crisis Line, call handlers sometimes had to deal with callers with complex issues and increasing high risk. They were able to deal with these calls because of their training and experience of working in Mind, alongside the support of Mind as an organisation. However, as need and complexity increases and without additional funding, the future of the Wellbeing Line is under review. These high-risk complex callers were either unaware of the Crisis Line or chose not to call the Crisis Line. The reasons for this were not explored for this report. As services return to normal there is a danger that people are calling the Wellbeing Line rather than the funded Crisis Line which is unsustainable going forward.

## Recommendations

The Wellbeing Line has proven to be overwhelmingly beneficial and well received by callers during the early months of the Coronavirus pandemic and as the service continues to be accessed by high numbers of callers the Wellbeing Line should be reviewed in the next 6 months by Mind, the Local Authority, Oxleas and Bexley Clinical Commissioning Group to establish the following:-

If there is a need for the Wellbeing Line, taking into consideration the increasing complexity and higher needs of callers and the Crisis service already provided by the existing Oxleas Crisis Line?

Due to the continued pressures and restrictions on local residents' lives as they live with Covid-19. What would be the impact on local residents if the Wellbeing Line is closed?

The increasing complexity and multiple needs of callers should be explored to see how the service can be supported by and link better to the Crisis service already provided by Oxleas Crisis Line.

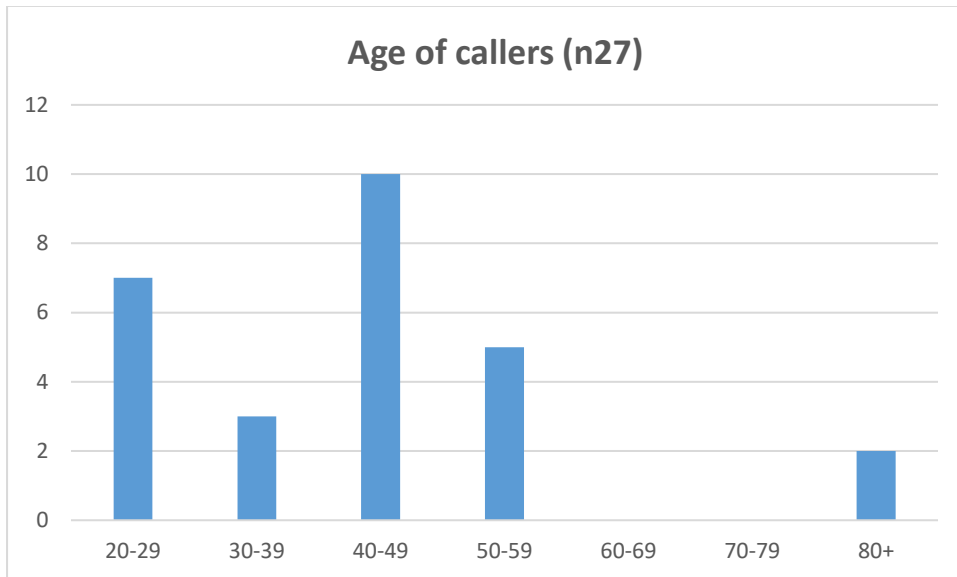
Additional funding, including grant and charitable funding should be explored to support the service, as without additional funding the Wellbeing Line may not be viable or sustainable.

The support and supervision available from Oxleas for Wellbeing Line volunteers should be explored to ensure those volunteering on the Wellbeing Line are able to access help if they need it.

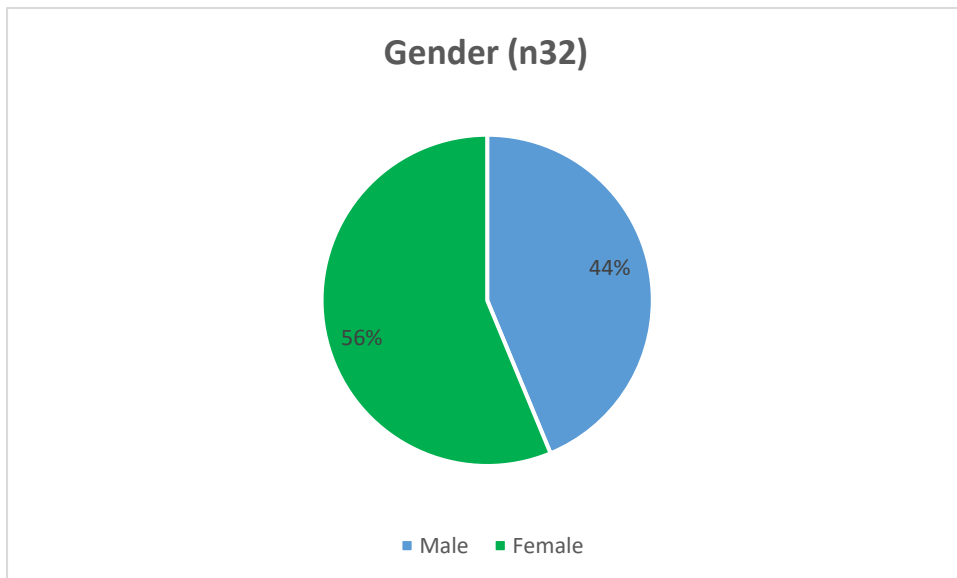
Since writing this report MIND have secured funding from their community fundraising scheme to partly support the Wellbeing Line for a further 6 months. However, the points raised in the recommendations regarding the future sustainability of the Wellbeing Line should still be addressed by Mind, the Local Authority, Oxleas and Bexley Clinical commissioning Group.

## Demographics

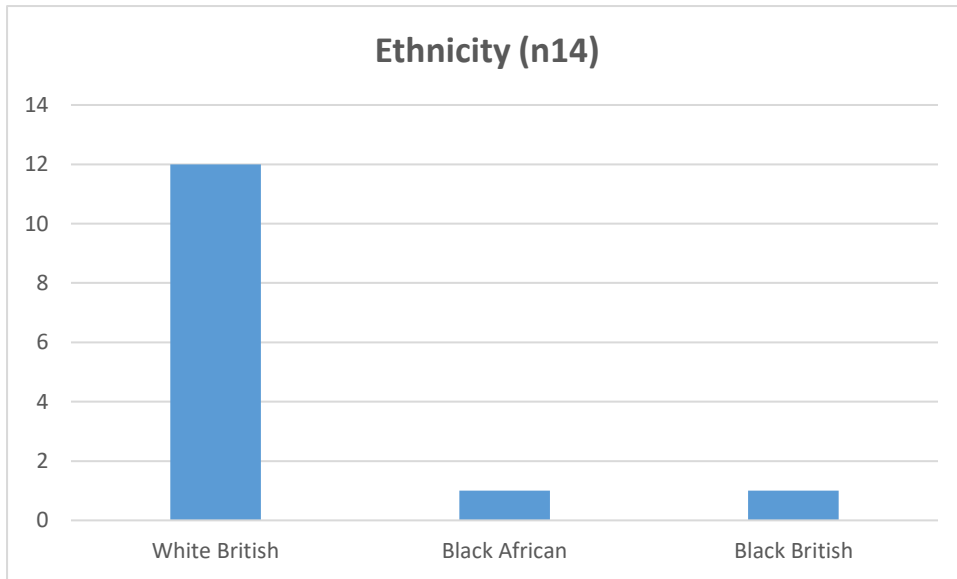
### Age



### Gender



## Ethnicity



## Disability

