

Summary from NZDSN Regional Zoom meetings 29 April 2020

Issues/Concerns:

- Feedback given to MOH by providers is not reflected in DSS guidelines. Some people directly questioning if DSS is actually listening to the feedback (eg around family visits).
- Current main challenge is around ensuring any family visits can happen safely under L3. Concern that the complexity has been underestimated in achieving this, especially around the number of people supported who have health conditions which place them at higher risk and working through infection prevention steps with families. Families so far have been incredibly supportive as likewise they also do not want to do anything that would put anyone at risk.
- When can providers expect Level 2 guidance? Urgent call for earlier and more specific level 2 guidance based on the expected and raised issues by providers.
- Some discussions currently underway nationally as to what L2 might look like and the possibility that a regional approach might be taken, for which Nelson Marlborough is well positioned – no new cases since 3rd April and only 3 active cases currently, with no evidence of any community spread.
- Needs Assessors are starting to report an increase in calls, parents wondering what will happen with back to school. NASC still receiving new referrals and working through whether assessments can be undertaken virtually.
- Urgent need for DSS to appoint portfolio managers to all DSS providers (especially in Auckland). It was suggested to email Adri Isbister directly with any issues at Adri.Isbister@health.govt.nz and to remind her of the agreement with small providers network to get portfolio managers appointed.
- Request for official statement by MoH that they will be offering support to back up providers in case of challenging family conversations/situations around family visits. Garth has formally requested MoH to offer support. Yet in absence of confirmation, Garth Bennie has offered to personally support providers in these conversation with families. You can email Garth directly garth@nzdsn.org.nz
- Need for official acknowledgement by DSS MOH of growing concerns by managers around mental wellbeing/rising stress levels of front line staff within the disability sector.
- Urgent need for clarity around the return for vulnerable workers. Advice is currently being prepared (again too late). This is going to be a self-assessment checklist to help them decide if they are able to return to work.
- Level 3 stand down – Self isolating staff under L4 was classed as COVID 19 related costs. Under L3, this is not the case. In order to support staff, they have been encouraged to go to WINZ or have conversations with NASC. There is no guaranteed compensation from MOH funding for this. There is the option to use IF funding, but this is not extra COVID 19 related. Rules are relaxed and this will have a long term impact. Have up until 30 June for IF purchases out of budget that are not COVID related
- issues related to return to work (or not) under L3 – difficulty recruiting to cover short term absence when we don't know how long short term is.
- More specific guidelines needed around request of 2 weeks self-isolation for clients who return to their homes. Many Facilities have no capacity or aren't equipped for self-isolation.

- Need for extra funding for Residential providers to support people in their day online activities, when they can't go into day service or vocational services.
- Meeting the needs for diverse communities, Maori (need for more detailed translations information), Pasifika, Asian etc.
- ACC are not providing additional funding for COVID-related expenses but are providing PPE
- Self-isolation in Level 3 and opening up bubbles has relieved some pressure. E.g. if 1-2 more people
- Some of the people supported are becoming to feel on edge and breach some restrictions. Focusing on re-educating and working through what L3 means.
- Immigrant staff workforce visa renewal – Potential challenges if increased unemployment for NZers
- Staff experiencing racist behaviour – a growing concern.

Individualised Funding:

- IF Host lack of clarity around extra funding payments for support staff in level 3 that still need to be paid for although they might not work because family still don't want them coming at this stage. MoH advises people should be paying for people who are not working and are on special leave out of their Personal budget. It is still not clear if people can apply for the essential leave subsidy. NZDSN view is that if you have employees who can't work and they are essential workers, you should be able to apply for essential leave subsidy. Apply now and it can be fixed later.
- Response-reconciliation process with MoH is going to be difficult down the track. In order to protect IF clients, IF host has put forward a suggestion around working together with Taikura Trust on a clear process for reconciling IF clients budgets due to special leave payments.
- Garth will follow-up with MoH, regarding IF Host query. He has received feedback that both wage subsidy and essential workers leave applying portal has been very responsive.

Positive outcomes of COVID 19 crisis

- **Call to DSS to hold momentum on achieved positive outcomes as a result of the COVID 19 crisis!!!!**
 - Suddenly working with Flexible contracts is possible.
 - Response by Explore at the start of level 4 has been fast and good. Before COVID19 was an issue, how can we hold on to this?
- More choice offered by day programmes through online activities. People love all the offered on-line activities. New ways of working welcomed. Some people have better than going to the overstimulating day services premises!
- Day services are gaining value from interacting in a different way. They do not want to go back to the old way of working.
- Some people who have challenging behaviours or high anxiety have coped very well with lockdown / less need for PRN medication etc -
- The need for creative solutions to deal with COVID 19 crisis has led to a more EGL aligned working approach. Providers encouraged to assume competence!!
- Providers are more focused on exploring opportunities to be more creative and celebrate events
- Noticed decrease in incidents/events and health issues when staff were living in during L4.
- Autism NZ reports that most calls now are from parents about how to deal with anxiety about not knowing what L2 will look like and how they will get children back to school as children finding lockdown far less stressful than school routines.

- One region noted there have been low levels of incidents, it will be interesting to see presentations/behaviours change over time. If there were to be changes in service delivery approaches coming out of this - How do people not lose ground in terms of not only funding but supporting the development of meaningful networks, skill development and community participation? There has been a reduction in pressure on staff getting people to a place at a certain time, rather than meeting the needs of people. Is there a way to achieve outcomes by doing things differently? Transport for example is done at peak hour – there is so much to take into consideration to reduce these sort of stresses in their lives. Getting people up at 6.30am for them to get to placement through peak hour traffic, there a lot of factors, that this affects staff as well.
- Growing awareness that there is no need for anxiety around Infection control audits. It can be a helpful tool!
- Engagement and communication by Taikura Trust during COVID 19 has been amazing!
- Anna McNichol, MSD has arranged for day services to receive extra funding to allow for extra service and providing resources to people at home.
- Lots of Zoom meetings, music, art and speech therapy. Looking at how we work remotely has been positive, much reflection and learning about how this works.
- One provider discovered that tablets in houses did not have cameras so working using Whats App for staff and connections with families for video calling.
- Keen to meet and reflect on what we have learnt from Covid once it's safe to, and explore what we should keep doing.

Communications feedback

- NZSDN update was helpful.
- The MOH updates that came out on Monday were helpful for us.
- Early guidance around L2 would be helpful.
- Not helpful to receive information at 5.30pm on Friday of changes in service needed for Mon.
- It is hard to plan while waiting for a costing template from MOH. This would enable us to work out what our situations looks link in order to invest in the future. MOH have indicated they are looking at L4 reconciliation costs – ***Providers need this sooner rather than later to know what sorts of things MOH are likely to fund as this impacts upon looking to the future***, when out of disruptive time.

Support/Resources:

People First - L3 Easy Read Information being prepared. There are nine pages which will be turned into fact sheets. Easy read team assisting with requests from overseas too. Also providing some information to help people with disabilities use Zoom to connect.

<https://www.peoplefirst.org.nz/changes-for-people-first-nz-during-covid-19/>

Many thanks to all the Regional Network hosts/note takers for managing the Zoom meetings. There continues to be positive feedback on these meetings. A number of regions are shifting to fortnightly meetings.