

AYRSHIRE HEALTHCARE TEAM USES TECHNOLOGY TO HELP ELDERLY DURING LOCKDOWN

A team of healthcare workers in Ayrshire has adapted its working practices in order to continue helping the elderly during the coronavirus outbreak.

Anne Clark, 37, has been working as a Community Navigator for the EU-funded mPower project since the initiative's inception two years ago, along with colleagues Heather Renwick and Lynn Anderson.

mPower uses digital interventions to enable elderly people in remote areas to live safely and independently in their own homes by introducing them to various health and wellbeing technologies.

Anne works across the Ayrshire and Arran region, helping the elderly and those who have long-term health conditions and chronic illnesses to create wellbeing plans, in a bid to improve their day to day lives.

Over the past two months, the team has had to significantly adapt its ways of working in order to continue helping the elderly and vulnerable throughout the current crisis.

Anne said: "I work with people who have been referred from health and social care to teach them about different technologies and services that are out there which could improve their lives.

"We've experienced a significant increase in people being referred to us over the past couple of months for a whole host of reasons. Usually, we go out and do face to face visits with people, but now we're helping them over the phone.

"One of the main issues we deal with is loneliness, and this is definitely more prevalent now, especially for those who are self-isolating. Lots of people are struggling with feeling lonely at the moment and that can have a really negative effect on their mental health.

"In the past, we would help people who felt socially isolated by introducing them to different social activities and events going on in their local area to help them feel more connected. However, this isn't an option at the moment, so we're looking at how to use technology to combat loneliness.

"For some people, that can mean teaching them how to keep in touch with their family over email or video calls, but it's important to remember not everyone has access to this kind of technology. Sometimes, we just need to keep in touch with people over the phone and check in regularly to make sure they're OK. For some people, that might be the only contact they get all week, so it's vital that we're there for them to find out how they're getting on.

“We’ve also been helping people use technology to organise online food deliveries. We talk them through the process of setting up an account and using the internet or an app to order their groceries.

“Physical health has also been an important focus area. With so many people unable to leave their homes now, many are experiencing side effects like lethargy or their muscles seizing up, so we’ve been encouraging them to use technology that can help them keep active. For example, we recently helped someone use their tablet to access online videos of chair exercises for them to do at home.”

The mPower project operates across Ayrshire and Arran, Dumfries and Galloway and the Western Isles, as well as in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Anne continued: “It’s an extremely rewarding job. The feedback we’ve received from the people we’ve helped in recent weeks has been so heart-warming. I’m delighted to be able to make people feel better in any way I can during this difficult time.

“The project has always been about supporting people, and you could say that’s more important now than ever. I’m really proud of the way our team has adapted to continue helping those who need it most by making positive differences to their lives.”

The mPower project has a budget of €10.1 million and is funded through the European Union’s INTERREG VA Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.

The project is match funded by the Northern Ireland Executive, the Irish Government and the Scottish Government.

For more information, visit <https://mpowerhealth.eu>.

To self-refer to the project or to find out more for a family member please contact the mPower Ayrshire and Arran Community Navigators Anne Clark or Heather Renwick. Telephone on 01292 660444 or email Clinical_mPower_BiggartHospital@aapct.scot.nhs.uk