



### **A personal story from a staff member.**

When the pandemic hit many of our members did not understand what was going on. Many who were living independently struggled to access shops and food shortages were meaning they did not eat. Without sufficient funds, know how or support even getting to a shop was a challenge as buses and taxi were no longer available. In times of trouble, we turn to our friends for help, the friends of adults with learning disabilities are normally other adults with learning disabilities, all in similar situations.

The lack of internet provision also meant many were unable to access on line services or report their situation to the very authorities that were supposed to help them. When you don't read or write, when your bus stops coming, when the food in the shops is all gone, day services are closed, when you have no internet and only a bank card for withdrawing cash what are you supposed to do.

The first 6 weeks of the pandemic had me searching for supplies, registering people with food banks, repeating myself time and time again when trying to refer people for food parcels..(Why can't they go to shops, why can't they shop on line etc etc) slowly the food situation began to resolve itself, our charity was successful in obtaining some funding to buy ipads and get people connected to the internet, we quickly produced Easy Read guides on using ipads, Zoom, social media, I spent many hours on hold to banks standing outside in all weathers while I tried to get bank cards changed, or taught someone how to use an ipad through the window.

As the weeks turned into months I watched as our members really began to suffer, News reports were complicated to understand, their lives had been turned upside down and many no longer wanted to live. I referred dozens to MIND, I used volunteers to phone and chat to members daily, to offer reassurance, friendship in a world that had become alien to them.

When I started sending out Activity packs there were 32 people wanting them, this number has steadily increased to around 100 being posted out.

We provided a Zoom meeting every day of the week for almost a year, reaching out and supporting vulnerable adults who had been forgotten or pushed aside by society. This included Christmas Day and Boxing day as many live on their own. I begged family and friends for plated up Christmas meals and used my own local community to provide gifts for the loneliest.

Our charity is very small, two of the part time staff were unable to work during the pandemic due to their mental health and the situation they found themselves in. I produced monthly newsletters and activity packs, facilitated zoom sessions for both social and training needs, continued with all the other works including co production, provided advocacy when needed, provided training, and took part in countless surveys and consultations. Our membership has doubled, and new members are joining every week. We lost our friends to Covid during the pandemic, this is very hard to accept.