Nottinghamshire County Council

The views of local organisations about the effect of Covid-19 on families

Findings from Consultation with Services and Organisations

October 2021

The consultation ran from 02/08/2021 to 12/09/2021, to allow for summer holidays on Citizen Space.

The consultation was promoted through a wide range of stakeholder organisations and networks and resulted in a **total of 26 responses.**

Questions were devised by a small Task and Finish Group, consisting of colleagues from within the Council and other stakeholder organisations.

Type of organisation

There were 26 responses to this part of the question. NCC services and schools provided the majority of responses.
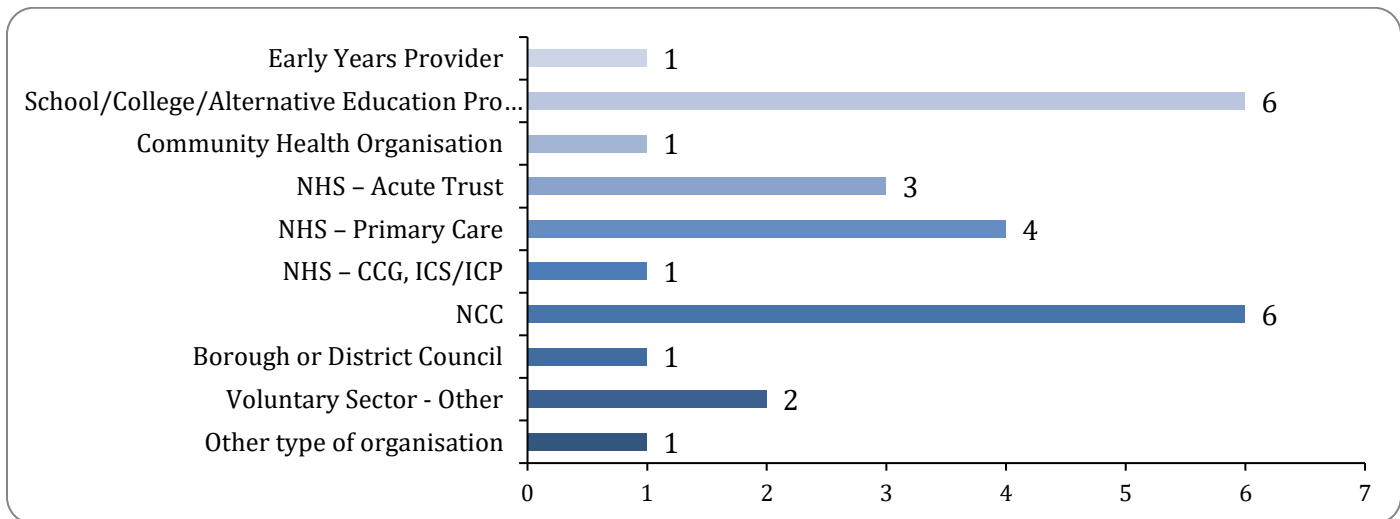
Did you see an increase in the number of families approaching your organisation for support during the pandemic? There were 26 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	15	57.69%
No	8	30.77%
Not sure	3	11.54%

Did your organisation see an increase in the complexity/severity of the challenge faced by the families that you worked with during the pandemic? There were 26 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	22	84.62%
No	3	11.54%
Not sure	1	3.85%

Please tell us a little more about the challenges the families you work with are facing: There were 21 responses to this part of the question.

There were challenges in getting children and particular families to engage with remote learning and reattending school once they were open.
Families who normally work or are self-employed and have no experience of the benefits system found themselves furloughed or having to close their business.
Increased social challenges- relationship breakdowns, friendship support, inappropriate gatherings, extra marital affairs, Domestic Violence, Finance - loss of earnings, parent mental health difficulties, parent, and childhood stress.
Emotional health *Mental health* *Poverty*
Furlough *Job insecurity* *Balancing working and home schooling*
Reduced income due to being made redundant or reduced hours. *Need for emergency food parcels.* *The mental health difficulties of lockdown and self-isolating.*
More families needing financial, well-being and mental health support for themselves and their children in school.
Reduced income. *Increased debt.* *Decline in emotional health and well-being.* *Increase in domestic abuse incidents.* *Request for food bank support.*
Our families were facing poverty also noticing social isolating and developmental delays
Being in Isolation has had a negative impact on children who are already showing signs of delay in one or more arears - as unable to access nursery / playgroups socialise with peers or extended family for long periods of time. *Most of the parents on my case load have emotional health and wellbeing difficulties -*

stress levels have been heightened the prolonged Covid - lockdown.
Services for families to access e.g. health appointments have been limited.

Accessing services provided remotely due to:

- *lack of an appropriate device, adequate signal, lack of data*
- *difficulties managing complex home situation (e.g. home schooling of siblings) while engaging with a phone appointment or video therapy appointment*

Coping with impact of getting COVID or needing to socially distance for several days at a time.
Change of routine and lack of usual structure.
Managing the stress created by loss of income, social isolation, direct contact with services through face to face appointments.

We found family s relatives relying on us more to support family members.

* Financial Crisis
* Employment Crisis
* Children's development delay- Speech and Language and Social and Emotional needs
* Lack of support networks
* Low Self Esteem

At Citizens Advice Broxtowe and Ashfield (I work for both and have responsibility for their impact reports) we saw a change in the age profile of our clients during the pandemic with more younger people of working age contacting us as they had been economically impacted by the pandemic. We normally have an age profile that peaks at middle age (45-65).
We saw an increase in requests for help with new claims for benefits and entitlement questions, an increase in the proportion of clients seeking help with employment problems and there was also a similar increase in housing problems.
Of most relevance to this survey, families were impacted, and more people contacted us with relationship problems and family breakdown issues.

Lack of social interaction for children.
Families having less face to face contact for appointments and using video consultations which can be difficult with 2-year olds and difficult for us as a service to observe children's language development.

Challenges of claiming benefits for the first time
Asking for food bank referrals.

Money issues
Home schooling children and young people
Domestic Abuse
Parenting issues
Isolation
Increased mental health issues

limited or no access to services/ face to face contacts, families found this difficult, not knowing where to go for support, needing to access things online (although is positive in some circumstances) but difficult for others e.g. downloading different apps

No support with babies from extended family and friends due to restrictions.
Not being able to attend local groups for children and babies to socially mix.

> *Not having face to face to contacts with health professionals.*
> *Feeling isolated and no one to talk to about any worries or questions about child development.*
> *children and babies becoming very dependent on mums and attachment issues with other family members including dads if they have not been working from home*

> *The pregnant women and their families we care for struggled more with accessing universal credit/ the sure start grant and with poor housing during the pandemic. Also, a lack of face to face healthcare meant some things were miss and for example we could not provide as much breastfeeding support therefore the BF rates dropped, thus increasing financial issues. We also found that a reduction in the contraception and termination provision led to an increase of unplanned pregnancies particularly of women with complex health and social needs.*

> *Not being able to ask family, friends, neighbours to look after children due to social distancing, isolation etc. so struggling to attend appointments as no childcare or bringing children to appointments when it is not always appropriate. Less able to ask personal questions or routine enquiries if older children present.*
> *Seeking more mental health support due to loneliness, anxiety or generally feeling down/low mood.*
> *Missing appointments due to self-isolation or having covid so reduced levels of care provided, possibly missing information or seeing multiple members of staff and receiving differing advice.*

In your opinion, were more of the families you worked with during the pandemic struggling financially? There were 26 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	15	57.69%
No	2	7.69%
Not sure	9	34.62%

Please tell us a little more about the financial challenges the families you work with are facing:
There were 15 responses to this part of the question.

> *Families normally budget to their income. When the income stream was reduced or stopped people struggled to pay bills and buy essentials such as food and fuel. Even when normal work was able to be resumed debts had accrued.*

> *Furlough - additional support needed*
> *Job loss*

> *Families who usually work that were forced to take time off to look after their children or to isolate.*
> *There were less problems with the families receiving benefits.*

> *Reduced hours - reduced income.*
> *Being made redundant.*

Lack of income due to reduced income or loss of jobs. Families struggling due to children being at home more resulting in increased food costs. This was particularly shown more in those families who did not qualify for FSM.
Increase in utility costs. *Increase in food bills.* *Families took out doorstop loans to cover cost of day to day family life.* *Families not in a position to budget effectively when vouches etc were issued to FSM pupils.*
families were struggling to buy food and pay for bills
Loss of earning due to the furlough *Being made redundant due to the working in hospitality* *using more heating / gas / electric and needing more food to feed the family* *Having to be off work due to self-isolating.*
Loss of income due to work not being available, or not being able to go to work because of greater childcare responsibilities, illness, other caring responsibilities, needing to home school.
Not being able to pay for care as much as they did so having to shorten call times
* Food Poverty ** Redundancy* ** Childcare*
The increase in requests for help with new claims for welfare benefits is an indication that families income had been reduced through furlough or being made redundant (hence the increase in employment problems). *The majority of the housing/homelessness problems related to rent arrears.* *There seems to be a delay in debt problems emerging, possibly being off set by the government measures such a deferred mortgage payments and suspension of enforcement actions. We are concerned that there are significant levels of personal debt in the community that is a pending crisis and we are now seeing a steady increase in debt enquiries as the courts have opened up.*
Drop in income if they were furloughed or made redundant *coping with a low income and feeding their families while they were at home*
Increased loss of earnings for those in work but not able to work due to COVID and isolating restrictions *Loss of jobs and unable to pay rent or mortgage* *Increased costs for families from workless households regards feeding children* *Increased costs for all families in heating bills etc..*
Struggling to access universal credit and maternity grants. Also receiving less money from work due to the lockdowns.

Were more of the families you worked with during the pandemic experiencing physical health challenges? There were 26 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	10	38.46%
No	10	38.46%
Not sure	6	23.08%

Please tell us a little more about the physical health challenges the families you work with are facing: There were 10 responses to this part of the question.

Increased case load of people with long covid. Some had only mild symptoms of the disease but have struggled with long covid. We have spoken to a number of normally healthy people who are no longer able to work because of it.
weight gain *lack of exercise*
Increased weight gain of pupil's staff and parents
A number of pupils gained weight through lack of exercise. *Impact of low mood / depression on the body physically.*
Effect of getting COVID, and long Covid *Impact of social isolation - less opportunity to exercise outside*
More stress
We carried out a survey of our clients, 70% told us that they had been impacted by the pandemic and 35% said the impact was of a physical nature.
Long Covid *Mental health problems linked to worries about Covid*
Not able to see a G.P timely *Not able to go out to the gym, swimming etc....* *Limited to time outside exercising* *Parks closed* *Schools closed*
Covid

Were more of the families you worked with during the pandemic experiencing emotional wellbeing and mental health challenges? There were 26 responses to this part of the question.

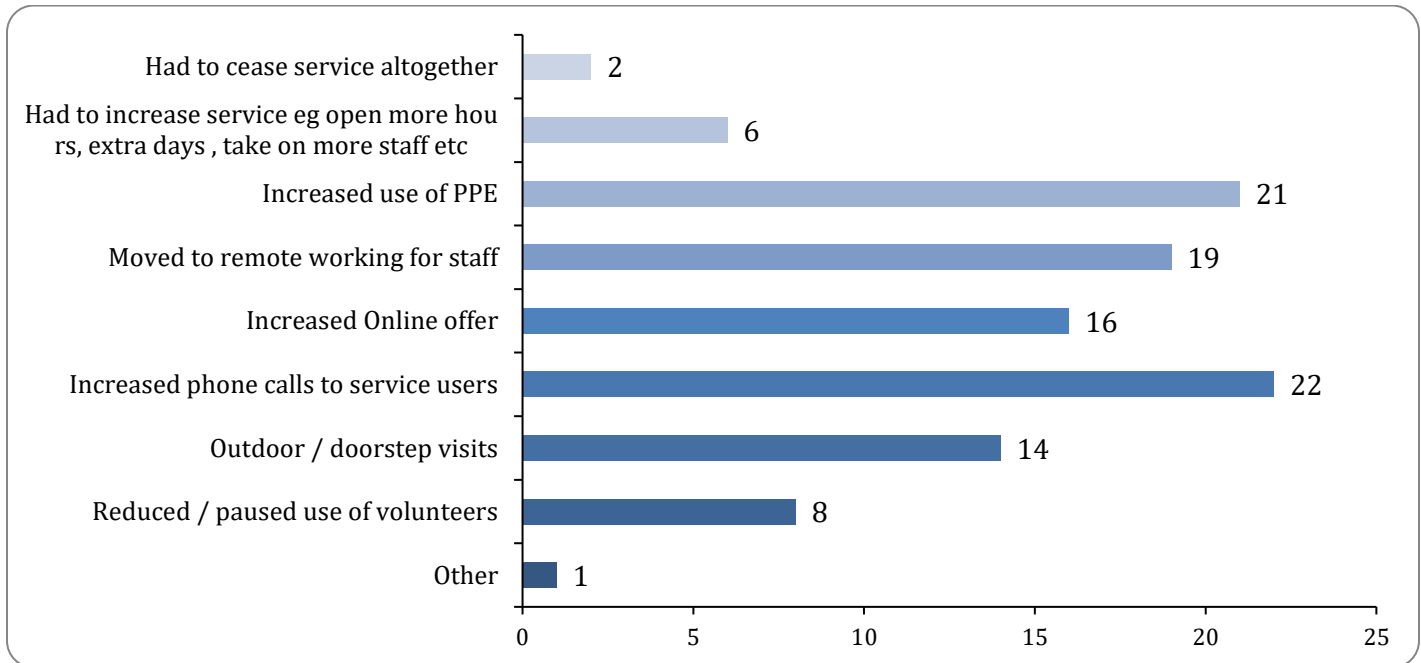| Option	Total	Percent
Yes	24	92.31%
No	1	3.85%
Not sure	1	3.85%

Please tell us a little more about the emotional wellbeing and mental health challenges the families you work with are facing: There were 23 responses to this part of the question.

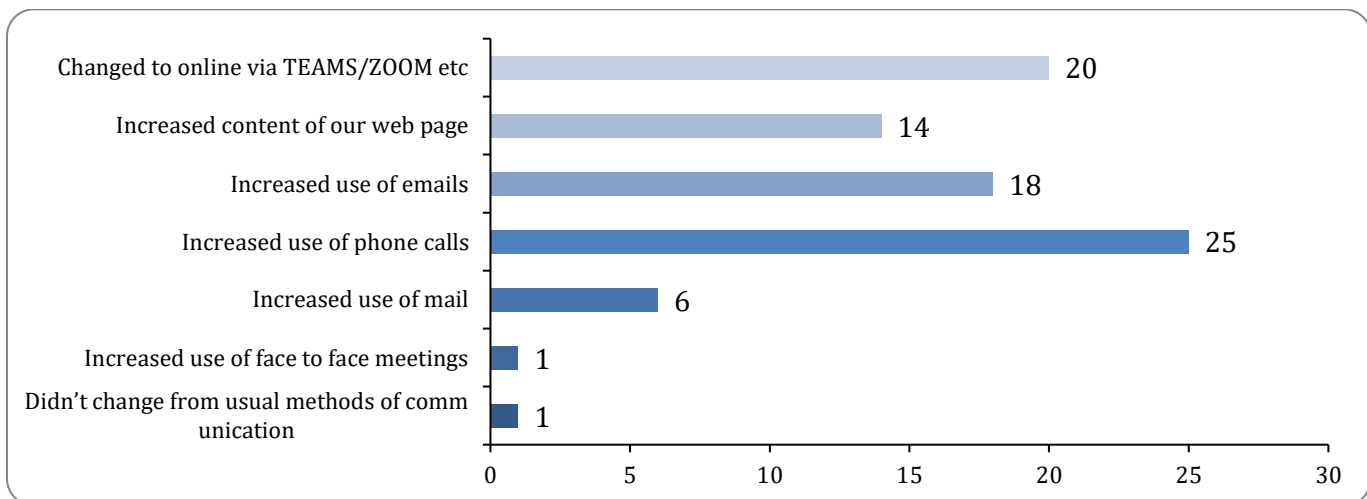| |
|---|
| *Many children were affected by the lack of routine, physical exercise and socialising. Some families could not support children in the right way and allowed children to get into bad habits such as sleeping in and not doing very much whilst at home. This has made communication and engaging with them now we are back in school extremely difficult and poor behaviour seems to have escalated with Covid used as an excuse a lot of the time.* |
| *As a result of all the concerns and issues raised in previous answers.* |
| *Home school*
fear of missing out
loss of friendships
parental stress and anxiety
inappropriate use of internet |
| *feeling isolated*
losing self-esteem and confidence |
| *The challenges of home schooling, access to technology*
Lack of space - of families didn't have a garden for children to play with
Feeling like you are all living on top of each other - no respite |
| *Anxiety about children returning to school, society opening, catching covid* |
| *Children struggling due to not being with there peers in school. Families struggling with the added pressure of home learning and children being at home more.* |
| *Struggling with not being able to connect with those who would ordinarily offer them emotional and childcare support.*
Decline in mental health and need to refer for support to specialist mental health services.
Struggling to make sense of the situation and see and end and how to cope. |
| *Families openly spoke about low mood and anxiety either triggered through lock down periods*

Increased anxiety and changes to medication for those being treated for anxiety and depression pre lockdown. |
| *families were feeling isolated and not always got family to speak to* |
| *No access to services.*
Lockdown creating heightened stress - |
| *Increased anxiety due to:*

• *lack of understanding about COVID*

• *uncertainty about the future*

• *impact of media reports*

• *crowded living space as unable to go out, go to work or school as usual*

• *drop in income*

• *change in routines*

• *unable to get the services needed or access what was offered* |

• *reduced social contact all round*
Stress
* *Isolation* * *Lack of support* * *Limited opportunity to socialise.*
In our survey of 84 clients around 65% said the pandemic had impacted on their mental well-being. We have put measures in place to support those clients in partnership with Nottinghamshire Mind
Families struggling with lockdown restrictions, finding space for the whole family all together. *Family members losing jobs, struggling to manage working from home when the children are present.* *Supporting older children with schoolwork and balancing work.*
stress in home schooling, being with partners 24-7, lack of income/drop in income
Worried about attending school for fear of children bringing Covid back to the family home, or vulnerable family members. *Lockdown periods - wellbeing of parents during the remote learning periods*
High increase in anxiety for children, young people and adults *High level worry about COVID* *Isolation, not being able to socialise* *Caring for older or more vulnerable family members was limited which added to anxiety levels* *Coping with the changes of no school or online learning, not seeing friends for young people has had an impact* *Social media content raised worries and anxiety for all* *Self harming within young people has increased*
lack of face to face services, lots of isolation, limited or no contact with others including family when having young family. *worried about own and child's health from covid*
Not having support from family and friends with new babies especially first time mums *Not having the same face to face contact with health professionals* *Not being able to see and speak to other first time mums* *Concerns and worries regarding being furloughed, losing job, not having a job to go back to, how they would cope financially, children missing school and how it will affect their development.* *how it will affect the babies social development.* *Feeling very alone at times and worried more with this baby then last due to not having support in place.* *Wanting some form of normally back* *Missing mum/Grandparent* *Delays in seeing GPs for appointments such as 6-8 week baby checks, immunisations and mum checks or these being via IT links.*
The lockdowns and having the children at home led to an increase in anxiety and depression for pregnant women.
Anxiety - ever changing advice, parents not sure what advice to follow, family and friends telling them different things to HCPs *Low mood* *Loneliness due to not seeing family and friends*

> *Postnatal depression - spending long periods of time alone/only with baby with no support or outside interaction*

Did you adapt your service offer / way of working because of the pandemic? There were 26 responses to this part of the question.
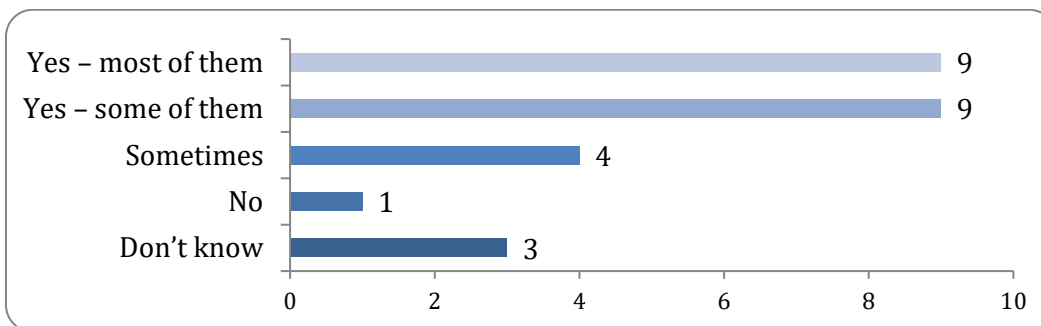
Category	Value
Had to cease service altogether	2
Had to increase service eg open more hours, extra days , take on more staff etc	6
Increased use of PPE	21
Moved to remote working for staff	19
Increased Online offer	16
Increased phone calls to service users	22
Outdoor / doorstep visits	14
Reduced / paused use of volunteers	8
Other	1

Did you change your method of communication with service users because of the pandemic? There were 26 responses to this part of the question.

Category	Value
Changed to online via TEAMS/ZOOM etc	20
Increased content of our web page	14
Increased use of emails	18
Increased use of phone calls	25
Increased use of mail	6
Increased use of face to face meetings	1
Didn't change from usual methods of communication	1

Did your service users have access to ICT equipment and Wi-Fi? There were 26 responses to this part of the question.

Yes – most of them: 7
Yes – some of them: 12
Sometimes: 4
No: 1
Don't know: 2
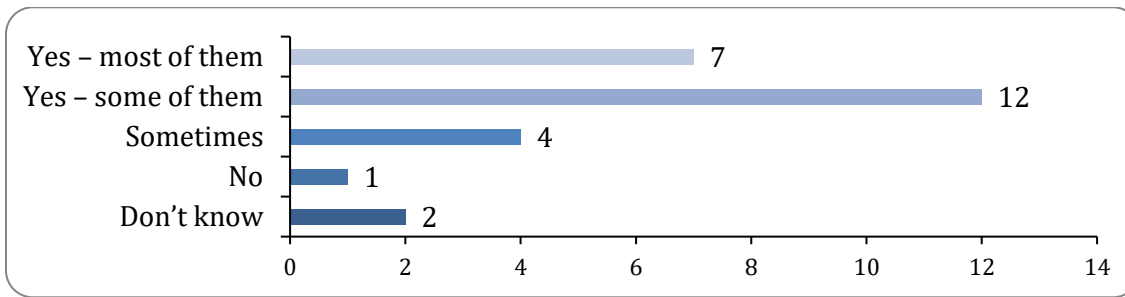
Did your service users have the skills and confidence to use ICT to access your service? There were 26 responses to this part of the question.

Yes – most of them: 9
Yes – some of them: 9
Sometimes: 4
No: 1
Don't know: 3

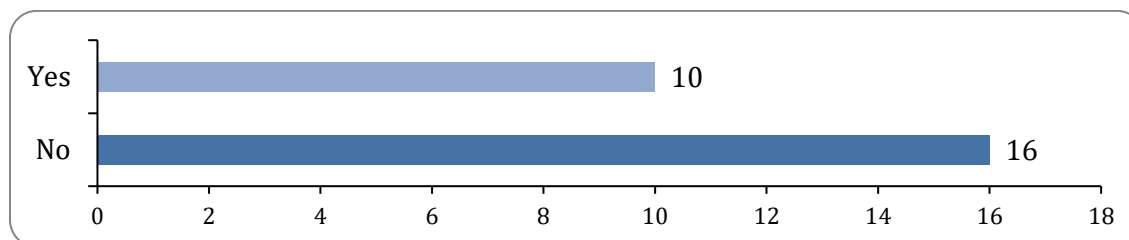| |
|---|
| *The DfE provided Chromebooks for us to distribute to families who did not have ICT at home. We delivered this to their door and helped with internet access if needed. We shared guides to help families get online on a variety of devices.* |
| *Gave out IT both government funded and privately funded serviced IT gave out free internet access* |
| *offered equipment and talked through process of downloading software* |
| *DfE laptops* *School iPads* *Donated IT equipment*
All of the above loaned or given to families |
| *Provided families with laptops and devices on loan from school. Provided families with wifi and broadband routers.* |
| *Provided families with guides to access the contact.*
Called and talked parents through the process. |
| *Mobile phones purchased increasing contact points for families.*
Laptops provided to pupils.
Staff available to support use of equipment over the telephone. |
| *we sent links out to families to join on line* |

Provide 1:1 coaching over the phone and written guidelines for joining online sessions
Government laptop scheme - loaned devices to families

Did your organisation do anything to help increase family's access to ICT equipment, wifi, skills and confidence? There were 26 responses to this part of the question.

Yes — 10
No — 16

(Bar chart with horizontal axis from 0 to 18; Yes = 10, No = 16)

Please tell us about what your organisation did to help increase families access to ICT: There were 10 responses to this part of the question.

| |
|---|
| *The DfE provided Chromebooks for us to distribute to families who did not have ICT at home. We delivered this to their door and helped with internet access if needed. We shared guides to help families get online on a variety of devices.* |
| *Gave out IT both government funded and privately funded*
serviced IT
gave out free internet access |
| *offered equipment and talked through process of downloading software* |
| *Dfe laptops*
School iPads
Donated IT equipment

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Laptops provided to pupils.
Staff available to support use of equipment over the telephone. |
| *we sent links out to families to join on line* |
| *Provide 1:1 coaching over the phone and written guidelines for joining online sessions* |
| *Government laptop scheme - loaned devices to families* |

Did your organisation experience any funding challenges during the pandemic? There were 26 responses to this part of the question.

Response	Count
Yes	9
No	17
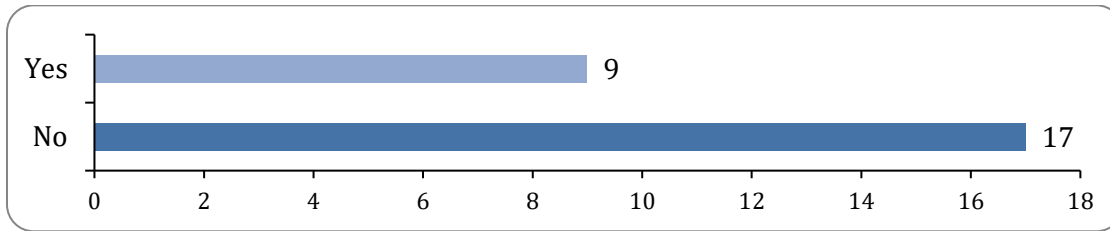
Did your organisation make use of any additional government support? E.g. Job Retention Scheme, Business Recovery Loan etc. There were 26 responses to this part of the question.

Response	Count
Yes	5
No	21
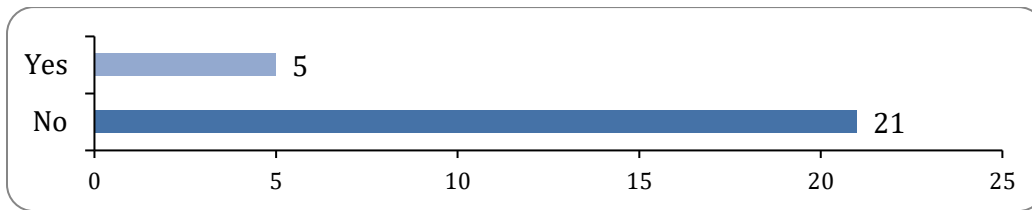
Did you provide any new services/interventions for families during the pandemic? There were 26 responses to this part of the question.

| Response	Count
Yes	12
No	14
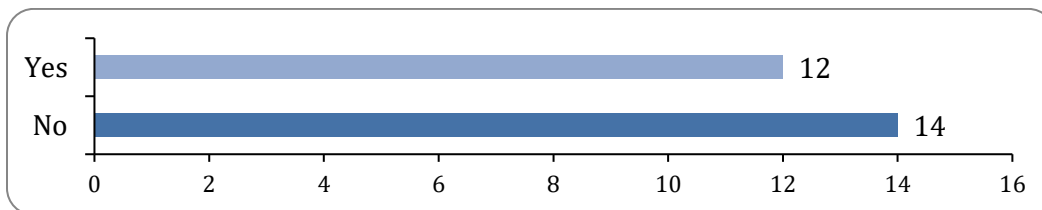
Please tell us a little more about the additional support your organisation provided to families you work with during the pandemic: There were 10 responses to this part of the question.

additional opening for vulnerable families *additional computer equipment* *additional wellbeing calls* *additional food parcels* *additional support staff*
weekly welfare telephone contact *food parcels for families in isolation* *home visits with PPE* *IT Equipment*
Providing food parcels *Providing physical home Learning packs*
Online groups available where previously face to face

we provided more door step visits and made activity packs up for children to keep them entertained
Did more social calls
With limited access to our office accommodation (due to being a sub-tenant and the host organisation being closed) we moved most of our staff and volunteers to remote working but ensured that some face to face appointments were available for those who could not access advice by other means or we could not progress their case without providing advice in person. However, our normal 'drop-in' service is not COVID secure with full waiting rooms, hence prioritising those who require advice in person. *Thanks to additional funding we were able to purchase additional ICT equipment to facilitate home working and protective screens and PPE to make face to face work more COVID secure.* *We were able to employ additional staff, such as our Debt Liaison Workers who were able to work directly with local government supporting clients with council tax, housing and other statutory sector debts.* *Our advice line numbers was made freephone and we increased the work we carry out through web chat.* *It was and remains a fluid situation and we have significantly restructured our services to be more agile in order to consistently deliver a service in a changing environment.*
Walking bubbles for new parents, suffering with isolation and increased anxiety *Health reviews over the phone or video consultation for non-targeted families*
When COVID restrictions lifted we offered a bubble walk to first time mums who staff were concerned about their mental health- low mood. *These mums meet with a health professional in a local park within Government guidelines 6 mums at the most and walked and talked asking the health professional any questions they had. The group were informed that the Health professional would meet with them 3-4 times and then hand it over to the group so we could commence another group. The group exchanged mobile phone numbers at the end of the second week and started to from a support group. These mums found that they worries and fears were the same due to being first time mums, not having support from family and friends and COVID restrictions .* *The feedback was very good and the mums felt they had benefitted from the group.*
Much more telephone communication and sending text messages/emails where appropriate. Online courses and information increased. More flexible with appointments to see people at home or adapt times or phone instead of face to face where safe to do so.

Have you seen any positives for your service/organisation during the Pandemic? There were 26 responses to this part of the question.

Yes — 23
No — 3
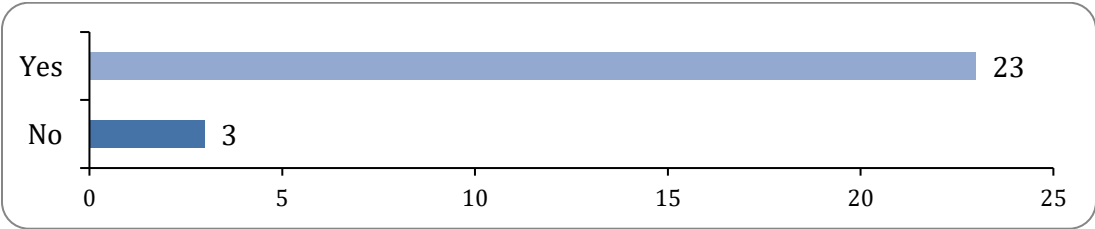
Please tell us a little more about the positives for your organisation experienced during the pandemic:

There were 22 responses to this part of the question.

Use of Teams and other ways to communicate instead of face to face. Staggered times of the school day have made it a calmer environment.
Team have had to adapt quickly to new way of working and learning new areas of work.
Team building *support for leadership* *moral* *support from parents*
working from home more cost effective
Video consultations have been incredibly successful for many families *Case history taking now done by telephone, rather than "in person" in clinic. Saves time when you see the family for appointments, as can proceed straight to assessment and therapy* *ISLA- platform where parents can securely send up videos of their children to support assessment, delivery of therapy*
Use of email for communication *Use of phone calls for parents evening* *Greater independence of young children having to come into school by themselves*
More people accessing meetings virtually as travel implications and time were reduced. *More time with colleagues not directly work with within the team due to organisation of the in-office Rota.*
Changes in communication systems. *Online referrals for families in crisis.* *Increased communication from universal services due to settings visits not taking place.*
we have worked well together as a team and have come up with new ways of working
Continued to work as a team even though working from home. *Coordinator communicated consistently always up to date with any changes.* *Have been pushed to work in to a different way* *Found ways of communicating with of services users which uses best use of time.*
Have developed new ways of working that can be used in a blended approach *Use of MS Teams for meetings, supervision, support*
Rely on us more to help
Increased number of participants on adult leaning courses online and Babes (breastfeeding support).
In our survey clients told us that after seeking advice they felt more able to manage the problems they face, access advice in the future and knew when to seek advice before a problem became a crisis. *They also told us that they felt more supported, less isolated and more optimistic about the future. The full impact report for 2020/21 is available on our website. A similar report is*

currently being completed for Citizens Advice Ashfield. https://citizensadvicebroxtowe.org.uk/2020/08/03/measuring-our-social-value-our-impact-report/ It has also allowed us to rethink the way we deliver advice in the future, we have collaborated much more, increased the communications and advice channels and continued to developed an outcomes based approach to the way we work.
working from home opened up possibilities for remote volunteering
Partnership between home and school Relationships between school staff and families Engagement with remote learning
More choice for families to engage, adding in things like phone call review points and video consult at different times in the day to support working parents. More primary birth visit's undertaken due to families being in the home more due to COVID restrictions. Staff mobile working/ SMARTER working has built capacity in some areas.
*flexible working for staff, being able to work from home, less need to travel *online training, being able to access things more easily, attend training sessions not local *online meetings, again flexibility, not reliant on travelling
It has shown health professionals that they can work in different ways and that some contacts can be completed in difference ways such as telephone, Microsoft teams, Zoom etc. Staff have had to work differently and embraced these changes Parents have found some of these beneficial
We now use Microsoft teams for meetings e.g. with social workers which is much easier and more efficient. We also now use telephone and internet links to communicate with women more.
For the staff, being able to start from home on certain shifts is positive as no longer having to travel large distances when it is unnecessary just to sit in an office when can access work and complete phone calls from home.