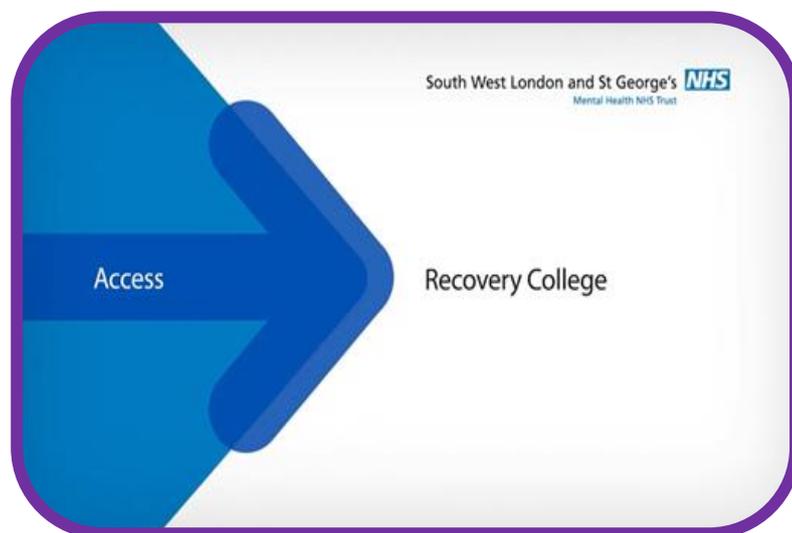


Self-managing Mental Health Virtually: SWLTGs Recovery College

South West London and St George's NHS Mental Health Trust (SWLSTGs) have a Recovery College that service users, past (within 12 months of discharge) and present, can utilise to support them with self-management of their mental health conditions. The service users are called students and they had access to face-to-face lectures and courses pre-Covid19. However, since the Covid19 pandemic, the face-to-face offers have moved to online webinars that have been open to all via the use of virtual platforms. The virtual platforms used were Zoom initially, which then moved to Microsoft Teams. The webinars have captured an audience nationally, from south London to Scotland and users have been individuals with experience and carers, family and friends of individuals who live with mental health challenges.

Lydia Davies, Mental Health Project Manager interviewed Lindsay Fox, Communications and Project Coordinator and Andrea Luis, Lead Administrator Recovery College at SWLSTGs to understand more about how they and their team have been supporting students during the Covid19 pandemic in greater detail.



When was your first webinar at the Recovery College delivered virtually?

We delivered our first webinar remotely on 20th March 2020. As a College we are very proud of ourselves. – Andrea

What topics did you cover in the online webinars?

Webinar topics range from mindfulness and relaxation to self-management webinars. We started off with 4 or 5 basic webinars, but now we have 40. Each webinar ranges from 35 minutes to 1.5 hours. – Andrea

Were all topics and materials signed off prior to engaging with students?

Yes – We created an entirely new hub of content that is online. We had to ensure it was paced correctly and that it was proofed. We are very co-production focused so we work alongside the peer-to-peer trainers. We cannot work without them. When we get the course material to go, we send it to the trainer or peer trainer to get their feedback. We sometimes involve the students too and they provide comments. – Lindsay

How many students can attend the online webinars?

Eight can attend the mindfulness webinars. We have reduced the number of students to six for the self-management webinars to allow for the trainers and students to have the opportunity to share their views and experiences. – Lindsay

How did the staff feel about moving courses at the Recovery College from face to face to online?

There were a few trainers who embraced the new technology, but others were quite reluctant. – Andrea

It was quite interesting to see the difference between the 2 groups (trainers and students). We initially thought the anxiety around accessing and utilising digital technology would be around our students. We weren't quite anticipating how challenging it might be to bring our whole team to the same level of skill set to deliver online. That was quite challenging. – Lindsay

How did you support the trainers to conquer their anxieties around moving the training sessions online?

We started supporting them in the areas they needed help in. The core team developed a SOP on how we were going to go ahead and what the protocols for the students and staff were and how we and the trainers were going to manage any challenges we had. - Andrea

Were the students responsive to moving courses and webinars digitally?

We had to motivate students to sign up to online webinars and courses initially. However, it has opened many opportunities for them. They all thought that patient care had to be done face to face and, of course, there are benefits in doing so. However, moving digitally has shown us the immense power it has to be connected to so many students. – Andrea

When we first launched the online webinars, we launched a call line where students could ring up and enquire about the webinars and courses. However, we had 5 calls a week, maximum! We knew we had to take a different approach. – Andrea

We did old school marketing. The database had contact numbers and we phoned each student to tell them what we were doing and encouraged them to explore the website and sign up. We did this in batches and monitored feedback and it was massively positive. The students, who were familiar with us, felt initially that the college wasn't there, so to get a phone call from somebody they have shared a classroom with and say 'Hi, how are you doing? Do you know what we are up to and what you can still get access to?' meant a lot to them. Many students felt it was the first time somebody was directly supporting them and voluntarily calling them to check in with no expectation that they had to sign up to any of the webinars if they didn't want to. This method of marketing started generating bookings from there. – Lindsay

How do you advertise your webinars at the Recovery College now?

Lindsay advertises the webinars every Monday at 12pm for the next week via the website. I then send an email to the database of students sharing the link and timetable of upcoming webinar sessions. Around 24 hours prior to the webinar starting, we send them a link and ground rules and who they should contact if they need to. – Andrea

How many students are actively engaged with the online webinars?

There are a total of 238 students who are actively involved in the online webinars and courses. – Andrea

How many of those active students required support to access the digital platform prior to the webinar starting?

Around 50-60 of them I helped individually to get onto the webinars – Andrea

How did you support those students who required support with digital access?

I would support them via email or call. I would get a few messages where they'd say, 'Andrea I don't think this is working' or 'This is stressing me out, somebody can hear my conversations'. I'd say, 'let's try it just you and me'. It takes between 20 – 35 minutes to get a new student up and running and to help them with their anxieties. It's an exhilarating feeling seeing somebody who didn't want to do it or couldn't do it, now do it with confidence. I had one student who had locked their emails and didn't know their password, so they didn't know how they would be able to utilise the digital function to join the webinar. I tried for 3 consecutive weeks to get them on to it. I encouraged them as much as possible to set up a new email account for themselves. Once the new email account was set up, they joined all consecutive webinars and really showed their commitment. I was so pleased that I called the student back and I congratulated them. – Andrea

It can be challenging when you have somebody who is anxious on the other end of the phone who may not be familiar with technology - you cannot see what device they have. Andrea does a great job in visualising what device they have and paces the conversation, taking things step by step for the student so they can absorb the information. When you have somebody, who has never used MS Teams before and then they get set up ready for the Recovery College sessions, you open up a whole new social network for them. They can then contact their family and friends and support network via the technology. That social network is vital for many of our students. - Lindsay

How do students' book onto the online webinars and courses?

They need to email the college with their full name, email address and best contact number. However, we have noticed that our students like reminders of what sessions are being run, so we send all the interested students regular marketing emails. - Andrea

Do you collect demographics for the webinars?

No, but we have a mixture of ages and backgrounds. Some students joining are in their 70 -80s. – Andrea

I really don't believe that there's a generation gap when it comes to accessing digital services. It is a pure knowledge gap and depends entirely on a person's background and expertise. There is an awful a lot of assumptions that older adults cannot use technology. However, many of these individuals were or are highly trained professionals in some capacity or another and may well have used technology in their careers. Even if they don't have the experience, there's a real willingness to learn a new skill among older adults that I think surprises some people. – Lindsay

Is there support for the students if any of the content during the webinars becomes overwhelming or triggering?

Yes – The Trust has a mental health support line. We have clear protocols in place so if somebody is in crisis or discloses a potential safeguarding concern, one of the trainers comes out of the session and contacts admin. If it is very serious, a safeguarding issue is raised via the Trust's reporting tools - Andrea

We also have our telephone support line which is manned by trainers and peer trainers if students wish to speak to somebody. We are able to deal with the vast majority of issues as it is often a case of needing to talk through anxieties with someone who understands and gives you that space. - Lindsay

We have taken a serious look at the kind of conversations and content that can be delivered safely and effectively via online webinars. An example would be our Taking Back Control course, where in a classroom we'd deliver sessions focussed on Triggers and Early Warning Signs. We knew that students found these sessions quite thought provoking and challenging and often needed support or encouragement following on from them. What we do when reviewing course content for online use is understand whether certain aspects of the course need to be given more time for discussion or perhaps removed all together, so these topics are only brought up during a face-to-face classroom session. – Lindsay



What do the set of rules look like for a student if they join a webinar via Microsoft Teams?

We already had a set of ground rules that were established for our classrooms initially. We have adapted these for our online sessions. Rules include the student being in a private space, that the session will not be recorded, that it is up to the student if they want to provide their name or keep their camera turned on etc. The trainers will check in during the webinars to allow for questions and ensure the students are still present on the call. As much as possible, the trainer will encourage the use of cameras to promote a sense of interaction and classroom style learning. – Lindsay

What other resources are on offer to students?

We have an e-learning hub that students can access at any time. They can be signposted to the e-learning hub following a webinar for additional resources to help them self-manage their mental health. We found that those topics or modules that follow on from the webinar are getting higher hit rates on the e-learning hub, showing people are wanting to engage with our content to support themselves. – Lindsay

