

## Supporting those with learning disabilities during lockdown

Lockdown has been challenging for everyone, but the next article reminds us that some people have suffered more than others.

“My friend Eleanor [Names have been changed.] is a fit and active 70 years old. Until Covid-19 appeared she was a reflexology practitioner. She posts a picture of her fruit and vegetable garden every day on social media. This is therapeutic for her since her supportive family insist that she stay at home during lockdown. The caption for all her photos is ‘another groundhog day’. But Eleanor knows that she is fortunate, as she has family contact and many friends ring, text or comment on her lovely garden on social media posts. This, she says, stops her going ‘stir crazy’.

“A definition of groundhog day is ‘*a situation in which a series of unwelcome or tedious events appear to be occurring in exactly the same way*’.

“All of us have felt this at some time during Covid-19. For those of us who have full cognition, a supportive family and hobbies our Groundhog days are manageable though very unsettling. Others we know have endured unimaginable stress, particularly those with learning difficulties and their family carers.

“Angus is 43 years old, has moderate learning difficulties and autism and lives with his mum, Gwen, aged 68, who has been caring for him all of his life. For Angus and Gwen groundhog days run into groundhog months of real distress and exhaustion. There is no respite. Angus is a poor sleeper and is upset through the day without the diversion of the day centre, which closed in March due to the lockdown. Being upset, he may shout and repeat himself over and over again. Gwen tries to keep him occupied and active, taking him for short walks if he is compliant. Gwen also has an elderly mother living nearby who she visits. She is exhausted and at her wits’ end. Those at her church who would help to keep company with Angus cannot, due to the restrictions of the lockdown.

“As an Ordained Local Minister in the role of Chaplain to Vulnerable groups in Ross Presbytery, and a volunteer with Prospects Across Scotland (PAS) - an accessible worship group for those with learning difficulties, I want to raise awareness of the unbearable strain that those with learning difficulties and their carers are living under. Are our churches implementing co-ordinated efforts to demonstrate support and inclusivity for those in this situation?

“We appreciate that the elderly and those with underlying health conditions are having an extremely upsetting time. Many Care Home residents are particularly distressed with lack of physical connection with their family. Do we consider that those with learning difficulties and their carers at home are having an exceptionally hard time, lacking support and connection, their routine being completely upset due to having no respite? Some have said they feel abandoned as, unlike Care Homes, they do not make headline news.

“There are many acts of kindness by individuals in our community to those in need. It would therefore be hoped that local church fellowships would be alert to those who are vulnerable and the carers and put an organised structure in place to keep those under immeasurable strain connected and supported.

“It was heartening to hear recently that a church which opened their building again for worship has prioritised inviting the vulnerable in their community. After the first trial service which was open to all, the church made a special effort to invite those who had been less connected through media platforms and who were socially very isolated, to worship in a safe environment. This is a wonderful example of inclusion especially when it is presumed too easily that the vulnerable will all choose not to attend. Other assumptions are that those with learning disabilities will be all physically at risk or shielding, when many may only need to take the same health and safety precautions during this time as the rest of the population.

“Teams from Prospects Across Scotland keep contact with their members through media and/or doorstep visits and when it was possible, to enjoy outdoor tea and buns. Delivery of crafts to PAS members and presenting flowers for family carers is much appreciated. The national PAS group is attempting new technical ways of being accessible hosts at a weekly Zoom coffee morning and also conducts local group meetings on Zoom. Members, carers and helpers all appreciate this, as it has helped greatly to improve their lives during Covid lockdown.

“It is impossible for those of us who do not endure such hardship and difficulty and who have much more interconnectedness and support through this time to identify with their experience. Anything that churches can do to lighten the load of people like Angus and Gwen in or outside our church community is to be encouraged. While many of us are much less restricted in our movements than at the beginning of the pandemic, for those in the situations I have described, little has changed. Their groundhog days continue not just in boredom, but in great distress.

“It would be good if churches could share their approach as to how they support those in this area of need, remembering Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 9: 8: *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.*”

Irene Munro, Ordained Local Minister and  
Prospects Across Scotland Volunteer

*Please respond to Irene’s invitation to share news of how churches in your area are reaching out to the most vulnerable members of the community to assure them that they are not forgotten and to bring a little brightness into their lives. Send your news to the Scottish Churches Disability Group Newsletter [barbara.graham74@btinternet.com](mailto:barbara.graham74@btinternet.com) or Tel. 01563-522108.*

There is plenty of activity for **Prospects Across Scotland** members to enjoy.

- Weekly coffee mornings continue on Zoom on Wednesdays at 11 o'clock.
- A new Zoom group called Precious Gems meets on the 2nd Thursday of each month at 2 o'clock with the usual mixture of singing, Bible story, prayer and chat.

Further details from Ivy Blair ☎ 07827 939 520 [ivy.blair@prospectsacrossscotland.org.uk](mailto:ivy.blair@prospectsacrossscotland.org.uk)

Check updates on Prospects Across Scotland’s website.  
[www.https://www.prospectsacrossscotland.org.uk/](https://www.prospectsacrossscotland.org.uk/)