

29.3.20 / IFJ Meeting notes from 'all member' Zoom Meeting 1 - 25.03.20

Dear All

We have had very positive feedback from the Zoom meetings that we have been holding for all members and for those working with defendants and in the family courts. Many people have been wrestling with the issues around work, money, the problems that not working causes for the people we work with, keeping ourselves and others safe.

This note is to give you a flavour of our discussions in the 'all members' meeting which we will aim to hold every 2 weeks whilst the Covid 19 situation is continues.

Summary

For a lot of members, the feeling was that the most important thing we can do is keep safe and keep others safe and that this is the priority for everyone in the country. Some intermediaries will not be taking work until they feel it is safe to do so again.

Others considered that they wanted to think about how to create the safest conditions to enable them to meet requests for service if at all possible.

We know that it can feel really hard to say 'no' as we work with vulnerable people who may have experienced or been the victims of crime. We talked about what is really 'essential' work and whilst we are aware that it is not really our call to make that decision, some people may feel more compelled to try and find a way of working with someone if they considered it was essential to do so. But again, others felt that the only essential thing we can do now is try and halt the spread of the virus.

We come mainly from caring professions where there can be an element of 'the rescuer' in our personalities. Some may have felt compelled to carry on with ongoing cases as it is not always clear that we can say no. If ever there were a time to say no, many felt it is now!

It was good to come together and it gave us an opportunity to talk through our worries. We agree that all we can do is share our thoughts. We are not in a position to tell each other what to do and the aim is to collectively reflect and then each intermediary needs to consider their own personal circumstances and priorities and will take their own set of actions and decisions. (to be clear, IFJ is not advising, or promoting any one view .)

We hear that the police are not being given much guidance about how to safeguard or carry out risk assessments.

There was also some worries about how we are going to pay our bills. Hopefully the chancellor's announcement about the self-employed will reassure some intermediaries who were feeling like they had to keep working to cover the costs of living.

Detail

Points we talked about : asking the people we are working with:

- to confirm that the work is essential, bearing in mind the current pandemic and government guidance.

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- to say if the work is to be done remotely or in person.
Some intermediaries thought they might try and adapt their practice in the right circumstances, to assist remotely at the current time, even though we consider that this is not ideal or best practice or that it simply won't work with some people we work with.
- To carry out risk assessments in line with NHS/Government guidance (for example looking at the risks posed by the person we are working with, the OIC, transport, waiting arrangements, physical hygiene/distance available at the place of assessment, safety & vulnerability of those accompanying the vulnerable person/child before and after the assessment.) People felt that we may not be in the best place to say what this best practice is but our end users could access higher level NHS advice for key workers possibly.
- To explain the resources that are available to assess if the vulnerable person/child's communication needs can be met remotely. We would have to know what is available in terms of the technology, before thinking whether it might work. We would also need to find out about how technical support will be provided and who will be providing emotional support to the child or vulnerable person before, during and after the Assessment, ABE, Section 28 Hearing...
- We also discussed that a face to face assessment would need to be carried out and any report would need to be revised and updated when the COVID 19 situation changes and it is safe to meet face to face.
- We discussed the fact that the impact of COVID 19 crisis appeared to be having an additional impact on the vulnerable person's ability to communicate, (e.g. for those who had been in court last and this week in some cases had experienced that the people we are working with are more worried about the virus than anything else. The worry is that their ability to provide their best evidence might be compromised in the current national emergency.

A number of members felt that, even if we asked all these questions and looked at adaptations, the safest thing to do at the moment is not to go out to work.

We discussed that our aims should be

(a) not compromising the quality of communication of the people we work with by putting them in a remote working situation which may simply be too much for them, and

(b) not compromising the safety of ourselves or others (for example if they had someone sitting with them and assisting them with the technology, would this be putting that person at risk?)

Action points:

- IFJ to contact MOJ/CPD/Police and remind them that our role is unusual in that we usually come into close contact with people and that we would ask them to give some thought as to the safety issues around a request for service and how things would work in practice if an intermediary is being asked to assess, support communication in an ABE or do court-related work.
- Each intermediary to think about what they consider they need to discuss and to know before they commit to working (further) on a case.

Summary of survey results can be found here although things are moving so quickly that things may have changed for many of us. [IFJ Covid 19 survey outcomes](#)

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IFJ team