

REPORT ON ACTIVITIES 2019-20



OVERVIEW

Dandelion Time offers help to children with very challenging emotional issues, often resulting from trauma, violence or serious health difficulties in the family. Many children have fallen out of education or are in foster care, or in some cases have become involved in anti-social behaviour. Their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties are often a result of difficult and complex home lives.

Farm-based therapeutic programmes are provided for children struggling with a range of emotional and behavioural difficulties and their families. From our centres in Mid-Kent and East Kent, children and carers engage together in a varied programme of group and individual therapeutic activities. Our approach is family-based and creates opportunities for new beginnings and improved relationships. The service recognises the importance of being in a peaceful natural environment, absorbing children in calming hands on activities.

Therapists guide families to harness the healing powers of the natural world using materials such as wood, wool and clay, to care for animals and to grow and eat healthy food, laying down new positive memories. Children grow in confidence and resilience and achieve remarkable and long-lasting changes in their lives as a result of coming to Dandelion Time.

2020 has presented significant challenges for the children we support, but we have continued to provide services throughout the year, reaching more families than ever before.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

126 children aged 4-15 and their families have attended Dandelion's therapeutic programmes between September 2019-August 2020. From our two centres in Mid-Kent (Maidstone) and East Kent (Ashford), we have supported each referred child and their carer/s for a period of 3-4 months. Following an initial assessment, families have each attended the farm weekly to care for the farm's animals and gardens, take part in pottery, woodwork and wool-work, artistic and musical activities, and cooking using food grown on the farm. Sessions have incorporated:

- **Animal care:** Feeding and caring for the donkeys, sheep, chickens and other animals help young people to develop a sense of responsibility and self-worth.
- **Farming and cooking:** Growing fruit and vegetables, looking after the sensory garden, and cooking meals together provide an opportunity for cooperation and sharing often absent in the child's life, whilst promoting good physical health and nutrition.
- **Natural crafts:** Creative hands-on craft activities in pottery, green woodworking and wool work allow children to create useful permanent items, see the benefits persevering through difficulties, and build confidence in their own abilities.
- **Creative activities:** music, art and creative activities help children to express their feelings in non-destructive ways, shift negative behavioural patterns and nurture positive communication.

126

Children &
Families
attended



105

Children & Families
MAIDSTONE CENTRE



21

Children & Families
ASHFORD CENTRE

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Dandelion Time supports highly vulnerable families, and the isolation and circumstances brought about by Covid-19 placed them at a greater risk their difficulties could escalate (potentially leading to conflict at home, and further domestic abuse or neglect). The combination of additional pressures on economically and socially disadvantaged families, and the reduction in support from outside agencies, further increased the risk and it was essential to continue supporting families in this period. For many families, Dandelion Time was their *only* source of support in this period.

"It's like her whole world has shrunk. She's terrified of leaving the house and of me leaving the house' I feel like a prisoner in my own home, things are getting desperate".

"she's back to square one and all the old anxieties have come flooding back. The world isn't a safe place for her, in her eyes, so she refuses to leave the house. When she finally gets her out, her behaviour is very challenging".

Following Covid-19 Government restrictions and the need to safeguard families, Dandelion Time paused its multi-family on-site sessions in March 2020. Due to the essential nature of the work, the Department for Education approved the charity's plan to deliver adapted therapeutic services to children and families. From April 2020, Covid-19 contingency plans were implemented and Dandelion Time's **Spring 2020 programme** was launched:

Farm-based family sessions – In April-August 2020, 71 families have attended weekly farm-based sessions for up to 15 weeks, taking part in therapeutic activities including caring for the farm animals, gardening and outdoor crafts. Families have been connected with nature whilst

engaging in mindful, absorbing activities, which have helped them to re-build relationships and grow in confidence and self-esteem. Many families we support have faced extreme challenges as a result of 'lockdown', school closures, financial challenges and other difficulties linked to the coronavirus pandemic, and have reported the farm sessions and ongoing support have been a lifeline for them. We are delighted to have been able to be one of the few face to face services to continue throughout the Covid-19 period. Despite limited resources, we have managed to re-structure the sessions to provide single-family support.

Online Sessions & Telephone support – Most families supported since April have been able to attend face to face farm-based sessions. For a small number who were unable to attend, due to shielding or self-isolation, online, interactive sessions were provided. Families were able to engage in activities such as cooking and crafts. These sessions gave Case Workers a vital opportunity to provide ongoing therapeutic support for these 'at risk' families and retain an overview of any ongoing difficulties faced by each family.

All parents and carers of children attending Dandelion Time have also received a weekly telephone call and have been offered ongoing telephone support sessions with a Case Worker, alongside attendance at face to face sessions. In addition to the families attending the charity in this period, a further 55 families who had left Dandelion Time prior to the pandemic (attended from September 2019) were also contacted to assess their wellbeing and receive support and signposting to other services (eg food banks, social care etc).

Dandelion Create Time Activity Packs & Virtual Hub - Home Activity Packs have been provided for our current caseload of families and those considered vulnerable who attended since September 2019 – a total of 260 individual craft packs were delivered. These activity packs supported our online sessions and include materials and guidance for crafting, cooking and growing and provided families actively participating in our programmes with the resources to undertake meaningful activities between their weekly sessions.

A Virtual Hub has also been created on our website with video resources for our children and families. This resource is growing and very popular with our service users. The hub has three areas;

Dandelion Create Time with instructional videos with popular recipes and craft activities.

Dandelion Nature Time featuring regular videos with of our Farm Manager feeding the animals and nature tips.

Dandelion Story Time which is a resource for storytelling, an important element of Dandelion Time's service provision.

In the period since April 2020, Dandelion Time has increased its level of support to children and families in response to the additional pressures presented by the pandemic.

PRE COVID, Sept - Mar (7 months)

172

Group
therapeutic
sessions
delivered

COVID SERVICE ADAPTION, Apr - Aug (5 months)

244

Individual
therapeutic
sessions
delivered

74

Shielding families
receiving Craft Packs
& Online sessions

95

Telephone
support
sessions

DEMAND AND REFERRAL ISSUES

Referrals in the last 12 months have continued to be for children with multiple and complex needs. Children are often impacted by several of these issues, and we have seen many children

whose difficulties have worsened as a result of Covid-19 and the effects on social, health and educational issues.



Demand for Dandelion Time’s services in the period has been high. **117 children have been referred to the charity, a 20 % increase from 2019.**

As anticipated, the additional pressures and difficulties faced by families due to Covid-19 have led to an increase in referrals to the service for children struggling with emotional difficulties. The prolonged period of absence from school, together with additional financial and other family pressures and reduced access to support networks, has led to this greater need.

7-MONTH PERIOD PRE & POST COVID-19



Outcomes

Goals are set with each family individually relating to personal emotional, behavioural and relationship issues, and progress is scored at the start and end of the programme. Goals focus on the specific changes children and families hope to achieve, and the difficulties which are most challenging in their lives. Goals cover emotional, behavioural or relationship areas, and the family scores how things are at the start and end of the programme in relation to each of the goals they have set. In the last 12 months:

78% of families saw improvements in relation to Emotional Goals

79% made positive progress towards Behavioural Goals

94% achieved improvements related to Relationships Goals

In addition, a range of outcomes for each child assessing their emotional, social and behavioural wellbeing were assessed, through professional assessment/observations and feedback from carers. Evaluation of children attending in the period has shown the programme’s positive effect on psychological wellbeing, self-esteem, confidence and resilience. Many children have become less isolated and have reduced anxiety, fear, and other emotional symptoms.

Outcomes for Children



COVID-19 SUPPORT PROGRAMME: CASE STUDY

When the country retreated into lockdown the news of this may have left people with conflicted feelings. For the families who would have been attending Dandelion Time, questions of how to cope with this new “normal” arose. *Shane and his Mum, Vanessa, had just begun attending their sessions at Dandelion Time when everything changed.

Shane had started to feel relaxed with his peers after his first few sessions at Dandelion Time, forming the foundations of new relationships and generating positive shared experiences. Suddenly Vanessa and Shane found themselves at home with both work and school on pause. While home was now a happy bubble for them, their recent history of domestic abuse brought back the all too familiar feelings of isolation, uncertainty and a loss of freedom. Previous experiences had left Shane feeling frightened, vulnerable and anxious. Shane relied on structure and routine in his day to help him feel calm. Dandelion Time therapists remained in regular contact with Vanessa, offering weekly therapeutic support via telephone, but it soon became apparent that they were both struggling. Vanessa explained that her relationship with Shane had become strained and Shane had become reliant on her company all hours of the day. Vanessa no longer had support from her friends or family and Shane’s behaviours were becoming exacerbated. Their home was evolving into a pressure cooker of emotions with both of them struggling to cope.

While Dandelion Time was able to run 1:1 farm sessions with families, Shane had withdrawn so much he was finding it too difficult to leave the house. He was plagued with anxiety fearing any social interaction or being removed from the safety that his bedroom provided. Dandelion Time began by sending Shane craft packs with purposeful and creative activities. As these craft packs arrived each week, Vanessa noticed a sense of hope fostering within him.

After a few virtual sessions Shane agreed to leave home and try a short visit to Dandelion Time. Initially Shane found it hard to leave his car, but with the support of his Mum and the lure of a guinea pig cuddle he stepped out of the car. During that session, Shane sat with the guinea pigs, holding them close and stroking their soft coats, until he felt calmer and less anxious. Vanessa and Shane are now attending Dandelion Time on a weekly basis and Vanessa has described Shane as “doing much better”. He has been able to allow Mum to do things around the house out of his view for a few small opportunities a day. Vanessa has been able to do things for herself again, enabling her to feel more available to Shane during his times of need.

*(*Names have been changed)*