



COVID-19 – An Impact on FAST staff & participants

Introduction

FAST have been around since 2004 and are committed to delivering evidenced based quality services across Finglas and Cabra including targeted outreach, key working and case management, counselling, group support, aftercare services and family support services.

In line with the government national health guidance, the majority of FAST's employees commenced working from home (WFH) for approximately two months (April /May 2020). During this period 40% of staff were re-deployed to assist in the HSEs Homeless Health response to COVID 19. For those working from home there was an initial challenge on how they would deliver services, FAST is a client facing organisation and WFH is not entirely compatible with the ongoing needs of our service users.

By July 2020 and following the governments road map to re-opening FAST staff all returned to work on site, albeit on a phased basis from June. In order to harvest the learning and get a better understanding FAST conducted a survey with both staff (14 responded) and participants (27 responded) on the impact COVID -19 had on them during the lock-down period (March to July 2020)

Also, in May 2020, over a four week period, FAST analysed the issues that participants were reporting on during COVID-19 lockdown. The details of this are reported in Appendix 1 of this document.

It is hoped that the outcomes of these surveys will lead to a broader discussion around this on-going situation and see what if anything that we as an organisation can learn and improve upon in this continuing crisis that the sector and Ireland is facing.

This survey findings are categorised as follows:

- Employees personal & professional experience of working from home
- Employees technical experience of working from home
- Service accessibility during lock-down
- Quality of service during Lock down
- Impact of lock down during service

The outcomes are presented in the format as they were asked and conclusions are presented based on the outputs.



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1. EMPLOYEES' PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF WORKING FROM HOME:

In exploring employees' experience of working from home we asked the following questions:

Very poor	1
Poor	2
Fair	3
Good	4
Excellent	5

1.1 How would you rate your experience of W.F.H

- Most People (mode) gave a score of **3**
- Average score **2.7**

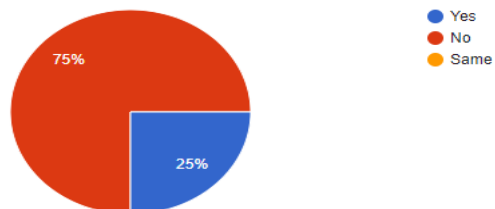
1.2 Requesting comments on working from home and its impact personally or professionally:

44% referred to the difficulty it had on their family life

33% referred to the lack of a proper at home-office space as being a barrier to WFH

23% referred to being unable to work due to their role / redeployment.

1.3 Did you feel connected with your team during the lock-down?



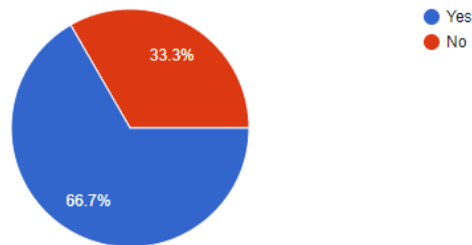
1.4 Requesting comments on working from home what could the organisation do to improve the sense of connectivity :

- More staff meetings
- More supervision
- More structured interaction with each other
- More direction with the processes needed



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1.5 If this was available as a work option in the future would you avail of this



Excluding staff where WFH is not possible

- 73 % **would avail** of this as an ongoing option – though
- 75% felt **Disconnected** from the Team

CONCLUSIONS:

- On the face of it, it would appear that staff took some time to be able to relate their existing office based roles to those that they had while working from home.
- Being re-deployed impacted on people's ability to routinely connect with each other
- Once a routine was established, staff were better able to operate as indicated by the openness to availing of WFH in the future.



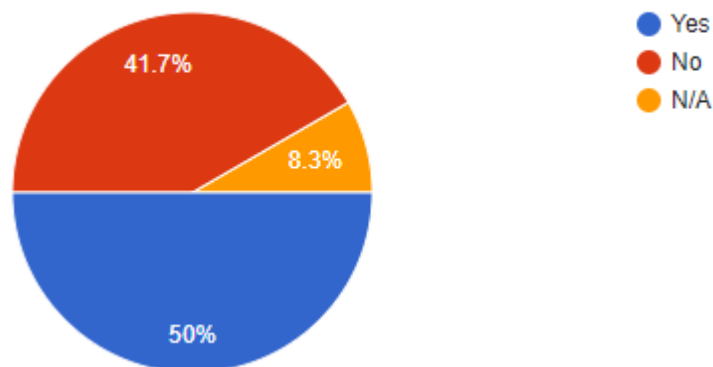
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2. EMPLOYEES' TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE OF WORKING FROM HOME:

Where answers are indicated as N/A means their role did not lend itself to WFH

As part of FASTs' Business Continuity plan for Covid 19 staff, when Lock down was announced, all staff were asked if they had a suitable device to use at home. All were of the understanding that they had. In reality it would seem most under estimated their needs.

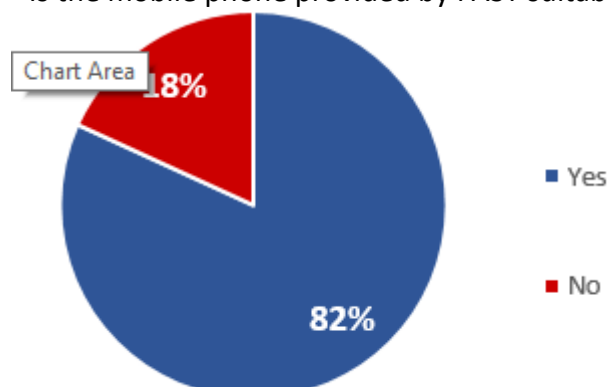
2.1 Did you have a suitable device to connect to the Internet to use Office products , eCass and gSuite



- 50% of those who needed a suitable device had one.
- 41.7% reported not having a suitable device
- All reported this directly to their line manager

Enquires made to IT suppliers during this time indicated a severe shortage for laptops/tablets.

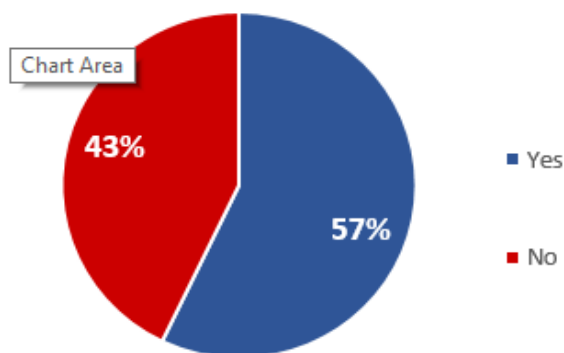
2.2 Is the mobile phone provided by FAST suitable for your needs





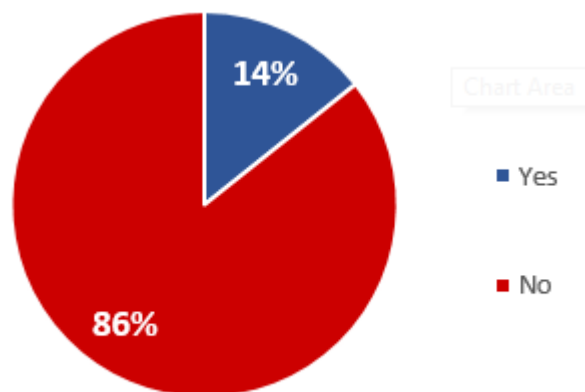
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- 2.3 Did you to connect to the Internet using personal WIFI?
• 100% were able to connect to the internet this way
- 2.4 Did you use your FAST mobile phone as a Hot Spot*?
• 73 % did not use for access to the internet
- 2.5 Did you use Zoom as a means of connecting with participants One-To-One
- Of those who it was applicable to :



- 2.6 Did you use Facebook Groups /Calls(Video) as a means of connecting with participants One-To-One
- Of those who it was applicable to : 86% yes / 14% No

*hotspot also known as 'tethering' or 'phone-as-modem, is the sharing of a mobile device's Internet connection with other connected computers

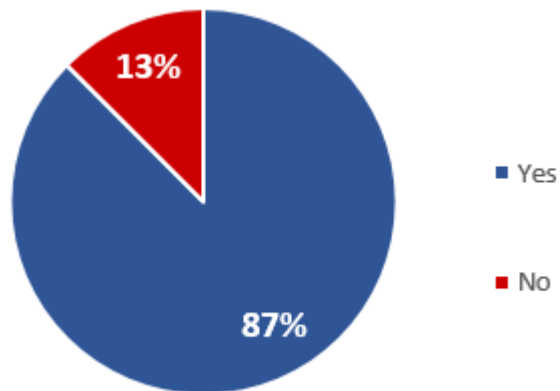




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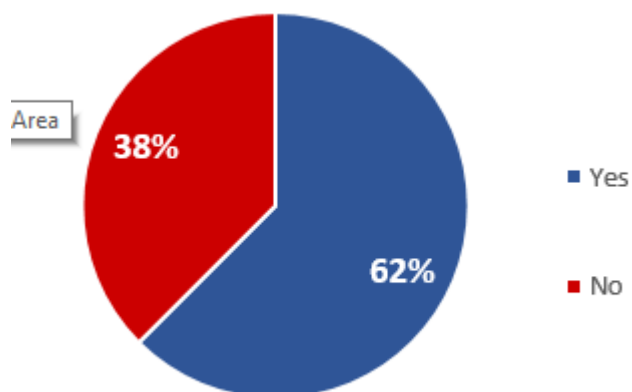
2.7 Do you feel you were equipped to deal with participants on a One -To-One basis using video & phone contact?

- Of those who it was applicable to : 87% Yes / 13% No



2.8 Do you feel you could benefit from training in this area?

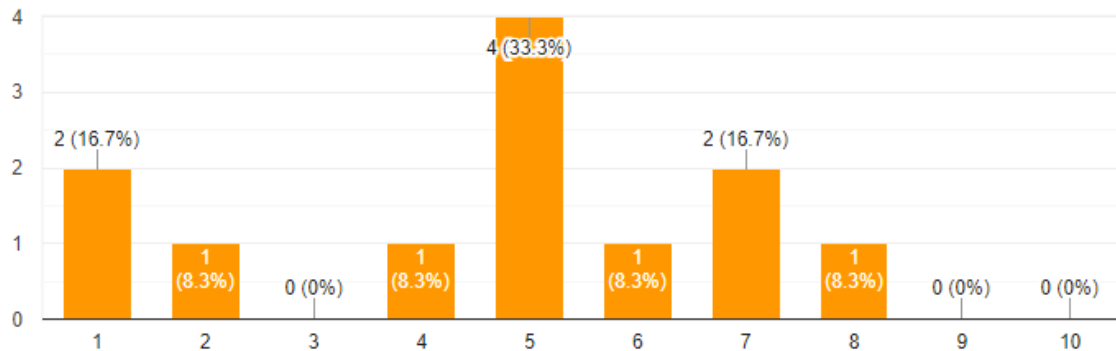
- Of those who it was applicable to : 62% Yes / 38% No





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2.9 On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being EASY and 10 being V. HARD) what rating would you give to your capacity to use a laptop remotely



- Most people (mode) scored their capacity as 5 (normal)
- Average score 5
- Median 5
- None scored it a very hard

V easy	1-2
Eacy	3-4
Normal	5-6
Hard	7-8
V Hard	9-10

CONCLUSIONS:

- In preparation for another lock down FAST should:
 - Ask staff to bring in any personal device they may be willing to use working from home. We can then establish if this is suitable for work they need to perform.
 - Petition other organisations for suitable devices (Laptops /Tablets) and to make these available to staff for off-site purposes (***Grant Applications for Capital Expenditure***)
 - Inform staff that the company mobile handsets can be used as a mobile hotspot* if their Wi-Fi at home is not available.
 - Ensure staff understand how to use any devices if off-site.
- In the face of another lock-down
 - Have a collective staff meeting to re-iterate all to staff on what is required of them while working from home.
 - Ensure they connect with Head of Operations when access to data is an issue.
 - Create a Google Lockdown shared Drive where all staff can access Forms / Documents as needed.



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3. SERVICE ACCESSIBILITY DURING LOCK:

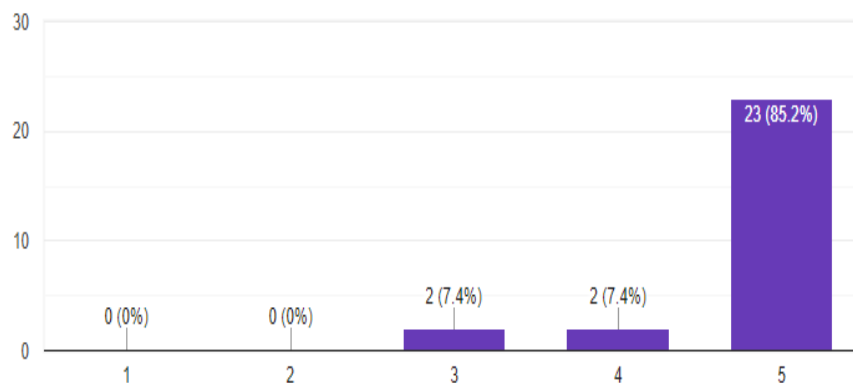
In our efforts to understand and evaluate the impact of the lock-down on individuals and families we asked participants to evaluate FAST during the lock down period and our accessibility, despite staff being re-deployed.

FAST employed various methods of contact to maintain service provision

- Staff were provided with company mobile phones, to facilitate contacting participants
- FAST invested in Zoom subscription services, for confidentiality purposes and GDPR compliance, to facilitate one to one sessions and group sessions.
- FAST used by invitation only Facebook Groups to facilitate group sessions
- FAST posted information and articles via social media consistently during the lock down period including staff videos, to maintain a connection with the Finglas community.

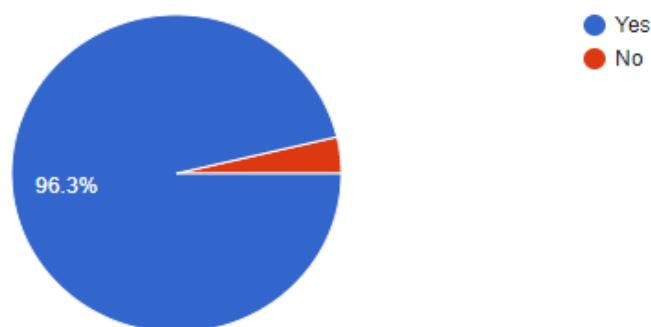
27 participants responded anonymously. Here are the responses:

3.1 How would you rate FAST's response to the COVID Pandemic



Very poor	1
Poor	2
Fair	3
Good	4
Excellent	5

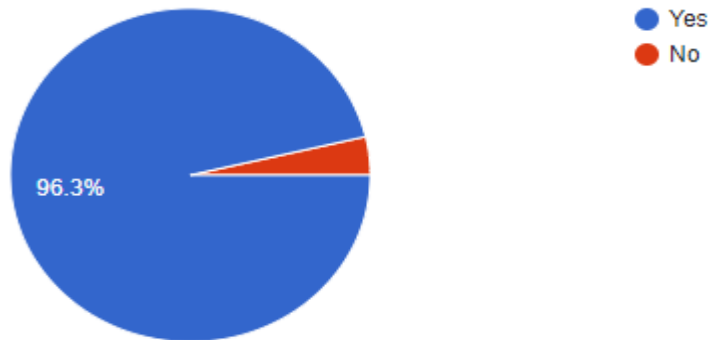
3.2 Was it easy to make an appointment with the service 96.3% Yes



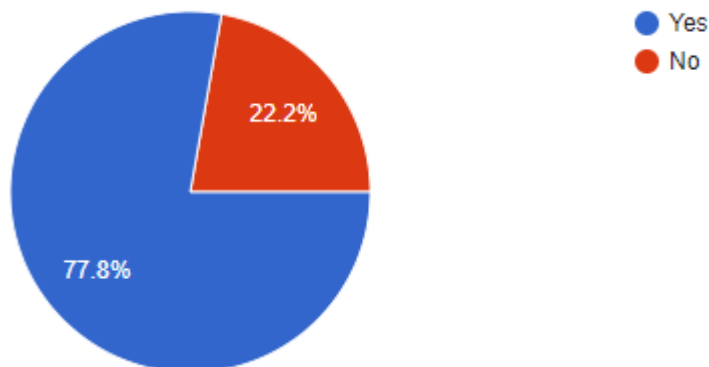


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3.3 Was the practitioner quickly available when needed 96.3% Yes



3.4 Was it possible to reach a practitioner after hours* 77.8% Yes / 22.2 % No



**Though FAST doesn't ordinarily provide an out of hours, staff who were re-deployed made themselves available for contact out of hours.*

CONCLUSIONS:

- Most people (mode) 85% rated FAST's response as being Excellent
- Most people (mode) 96% were able to easily make an appointment despite the lock-down

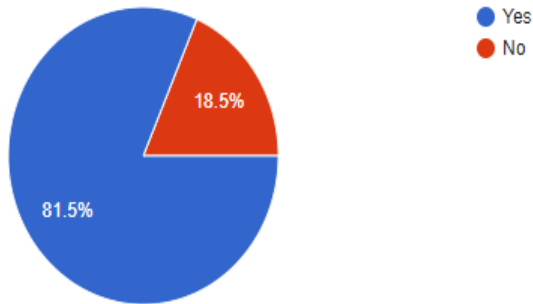
Therefore it can be assumed that FAST adequately met the needs of those surveyed. FAST maintained a high level of contact with its participants - refer to appendix 2



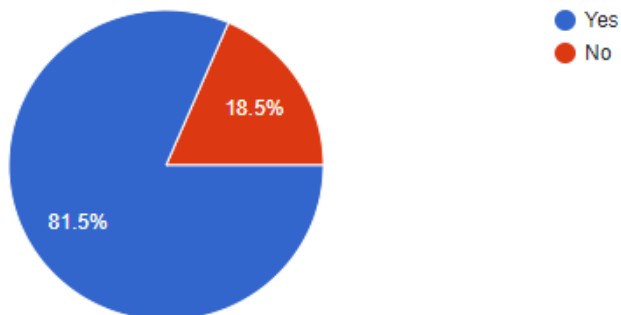
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4. QUALITY OF SERVICE DURING LOCK DOWN:

- 4.1 Did you use Zoom video call or telephone as a way of supporting your recovery?
81.5 % Yes / 18.5 % No



- 4.2 Did Zoom video or telephone supports advance you in your recovery 81.5% Yes / 18.5 % No



- 4.3 If Yes How?
Of the 22 participants who indicated yes 18 provided some additional information
- 50% indicated that the ways of connecting (Zoom & phone calls) was important in their continued recovery.
 - 49% indicated that it kept them focused and supported.
 - 1% indicated that they did not like this form of connection, however accepted it was the only form of contact.

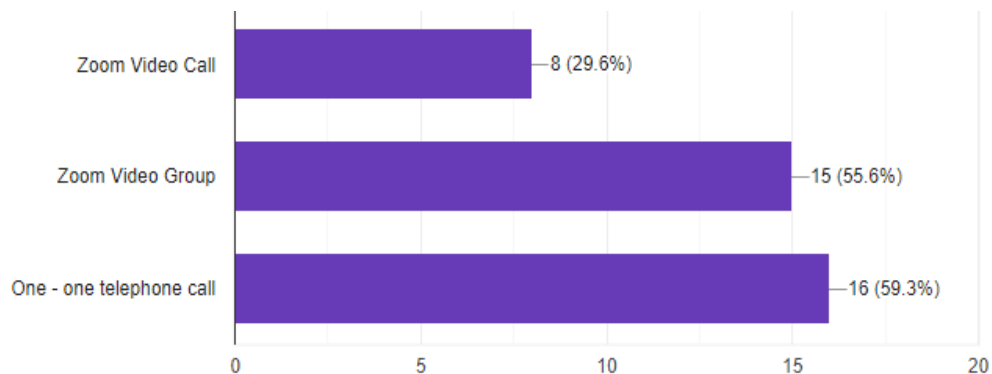


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See extract of commentary:

Felt really comfortable talking to other people met a few friendly people that i felt good in myself their was a good trust in the classes and i loved ever
Got me **engaged** when it would have been **not possible otherwise**
I changed my mindset im not stressing as much
I found my one to one **phone calls** very beneficial and felt alot better after the phone calls, it made me look at things in a different way. I also found the
I got na meetings and did counselling on it. I **didn't like it much** that was the platform available
I loved **seeing** everyone and that once a week is something to look forward to and it helps
I was able to **see** the person and talk freely
Keep me in positive form
Kept me head focus
Lorraine was always there when I needed her.
Lorraine and Mick were very good in the Covid response and dealt with it as carefully as possible to protect us and others.
Made me feel relaxed talking to group of people as was new to group meetings back in March
Meetings
Nice to see a face and **connect visually** and verbally.
Not advanced but **allowed continue**
Provided supports and **access** to Services that without this medium would not have been available.
SUPPORT WHEN NEEDED
Yes very much as without my **Zoom** meetings I would have had no structure to my week and I learn so much about myself with each meeting

4.4 If a lock down was to re-cur how could like your service to be delivered?



4.5 Please can you inform us of any other ways we could support you if another a lock down period was to happen

51% of respondents offered an opinion. Of these 2 offered significant opinions for FAST to take on board:

- Additional Information & Advice
- A dedicated support line – outside of agreed appointment times

See extract of commentary:

Additional information and advice

I find a phone call is a great help
I find the one to one calls brilliant and worksheets to fill out.
I think meeting in person is more beneficial once the clients and the staff are responsible
I would always look for support
Just to be there at the end of the phone if needed but I have my sponsor now and she's keeping me real. If another lockdown happens I w
Keep doing wat yous are doing smashing job by all of yous
Keep up the great work.
No, it took me a while to get used to the Zoom but have appreciated the help the Zoom meetings have made to my recovery and how mu
One to one support
Phone
Phone calls
Services and Support that were provided were excellent during Lockdown. A support line may be of benefit if lockdown were to reoccur
Was happy way support was can't think how to improve setvice



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CONCLUSIONS:

- FAST's decision to provide all staff with a mobile phone was appropriate, since 60% of people would prefer One-to-One contact by Phone if the same situation arose again.
- FAST's decision to utilise Zoom adequately met with the needs of the participants who chose to use it - 81%
 - *Of those, 96% indicated it was important in maintaining their recovery journey or keeping them focused.*

Therefore it can be assumed that FAST adequately met the needs of those surveyed.
FAST maintained a high level of contact with its participants - refer to appendix 2

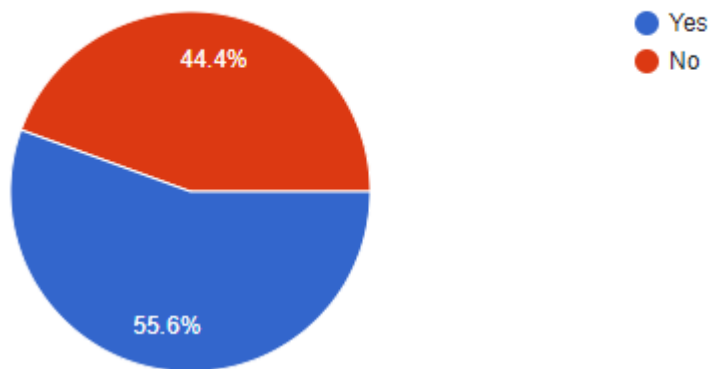
As a community project, FAST adapted very rapidly to the changed working environment with little or no interruption to services provided - refer to appendix 2



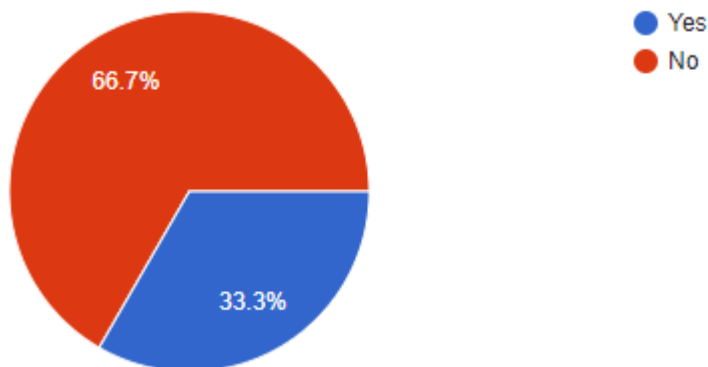
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5. IMPACT OF LOCK DOWN DURING SERVICE:

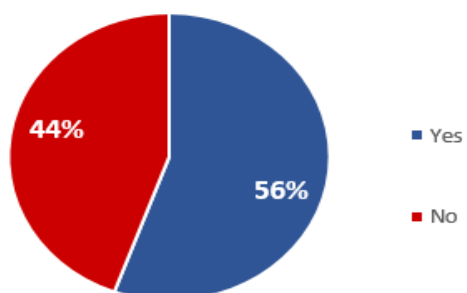
5.1 Did the lock down have an impact on your recovery 55.6% Yes / 44.4% No



5.2 Did a relapse occur during the lock down 33.3% Yes / 66.7% No



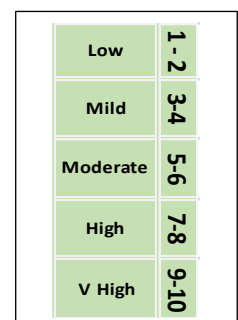
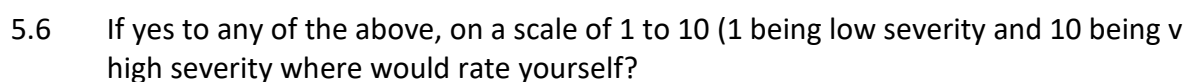
5.3 If yes to relapse, did the lock down contribute to this 56% Yes / 44% No





For those who indicated the lock down contributed to their relapse, 5 made the following comments:

- 85% of respondents indicated they had adverse feelings:





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CONCLUSIONS:

- Peoples' recovery journey was negatively impacted upon
- 30% indicated they relapsed and of those 56% attributed it the lock-down.
- Peoples' mental health was adversely affected. 85% of respondents indicated they experienced negative emotions. *Of those 41% described those emotions as being V. High.* This correlates with our Snapshot survey in April when 75% noted they felt they were suffering mental health issues

Overall Conclusion:

According to EMCCDA¹,

“The current public health crisis raises serious additional concerns for the wellbeing of people who use drugs, ensuring service continuity for those with drug problems, and the protection of those offering care and support for this population.”

Our surveys and interim snapshot review indicates that both staff and service users of FAST have been impacted upon significantly. Financial constraints of the service impacted upon the ability of the service to provide all staff with adequate equipment, which led to staff having to be even more resourceful.

FASTs' team responded exceptionally rapidly and appropriately to the needs of those who avail of our services on-going. Throughout the Covid crisis, staff continued their role of keeping people safe, adapting how they work to meet the needs of the people they work with and the restrictions of the Covid situation and the necessity of redeployment.

The Finglas community response to the COVID pandemic towards FAST has been positive and significant. FAST received three donations from community groups to aid in the delivery of our services. These funds enabled us to open more rapidly than would be been otherwise possible.

¹ EMCCDA update on the implications of COVID-19 for people who use drugs and drug service providers EMCCDA, Lisbon, March 2020



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Appendix 1: Analysis of presenting needs of participants during the COVID lockdown period

In the four week period in April 2020 **149** people made contact with FAST for one-to-one supports. In summary the following was identified:

Main Substance of Choice reported:

- 36% Cocaine (19% Cocaine; 17% Cocaine & other substance including crack)
- 24% Alcohol (18% Alcohol; 6% Alcohol & other substance)
- 16% Heroin (7% Heroin; 9% Heroin & other substance)
- 13% Prescription medicines
- 8% Cannabis (6% Cannabis; 2% Cannabis & other substance)
- 3% Other

34% report Poly Drug Use

Mental Health Issues Reported

75% noted they felt they were suffering mental health issues. Of these they described it as:

- 60% described it as Anxiety or Depression
- 10% detailed a *diagnosed* (self) issue

Domestic Violence - 8.7 % reported domestic violence issues in their home

Relapse - 24 % reported that they had relapsed during lockdown

New to FAST - 4 people contacted Fast for the first time

Returning - 47 people who had previously attended needed to re-engage

Ongoing - 98 people were current participants

Family Support - 32% of those contacting FAST was for Family Support



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Appendix 2: Volume of Appointments offered by FAST

Initial Contact & Assessments: 78 appointments were offered via Telephone/Zoom (COVID)

One-to-Ones by service:

Polydrug Dept. 461 appointments by phone (COVID)

In-Reach: Abigail 48 appointments by Phone (COVID)

Counselling Service: 98 appointments by Phone (COVID)

Family Service 162 appointments by Phone (COVID)

Groups VIA Zoom:

Family support:

Graduate Group: 9 Weeks 11 participants ~ 4.2 Attendance (COVID)

5 Step Method 5 Weeks 7 participants ~ 6.5 Attendance (COVID)
(Education)

Recovery Social Group 13 weeks 17 participants ~ 4.6 Attendance (COVID)

Aftercare 12 weeks 11 participants ~ 9 Attendance (COVID)

Other Group Programmes

Relapse Prevention Zoom &

Weekend Planner Group Zoom 11 weeks:

17 sessions 29 participants ~ 9 Attendance (COVID)