



Pretty Bubbles Everywhere

**A Blog about visiting during COVID by Ellen Vick,
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We live in extraordinary times.

The Covid 19 crisis has had huge impacts on everyone – but the impacts have fallen heavily on those who need support.

Covid has cast people with a label of learning disability and/or autism as eternally ‘Vulnerable’. We’ve had to sift through, often contradictory government guidance, to find a way to continue to find the balance between supporting people’s human rights, keeping people safe and ticking the many boxes required.

The number of boxes which need ticking seems to have increased alongside the R-rate - often support from external bodies such as CQC, Public Health England and Local Commissioners has felt like a few extra boxes to fill in.

We *get* the distinction between Law and Guidance but the consequences of diverging from either during Covid are equally stark, so we have followed both.

When we get out of the other side, the ‘Vulnerable’ bubble is one we hope to pop and also we hope we can return to a world where “going to see my dad” isn’t classed as a *visit*...the language of Care Homes has permeated, that’s what happens when a ‘Protective Ring’ has been thrown around you.

Who could have predicted that there would ever be a heated debate over family members being able to meet up and spend time together – whatever their living arrangements or household circumstances.

Unsurprisingly few organisations were prepared with a plan of what to do about visiting when lock down came and suddenly visiting was no longer

a matter of a phone call to arrange it, a trip in a taxi to visit family or even a meet up in a café for a cup of coffee.

Who would have predicted that in one of our first virtual managers meetings we'd state our aim as 'keeping people alive' so caution in all things – this has been the mantra of New Prospects from the beginning of the crisis.

We adhere to the rules, follow the guidance, encourage caution and responsible behaviour from everyone, and, as things change we try and consider the impact on each individual and do what we can to find a way to maintain some sort of normal.

During full lockdown this meant zoom, whats app, phone calls, photographs, facebook, skype, a letter - and anything else we could think of to keep people connected to their loved ones.

Was it as good as seeing people for real – NO. Did everyone understand why they couldn't see their mum or sister or special friend – NO.

Did we, New Prospects understand what we needed to do – yes I believe we did, and so we worked together with families and friends and the people we support, to do whatever we could to keep people in touch.

Since the restrictions eased we have created support bubbles where we could, social bubbles too. All was going well. People were beginning to see life open up – including seeing their loved ones after a careful, cautious individual risk assessment process to work out the safest way to achieve contact whilst maintaining safety.

We couldn't make it safe for everyone and some families wanted more than we thought sensible or safe and we had some difficult conversations. But we kept talking.

We are based in the North East and so we are currently subjected to local restrictions. No more social bubbles. We have maintained support bubbles in line with Government guidance.

We know we can't stop people we support from leaving their home, nor can we stop them from inviting whoever they want into their home. We never could. We never wanted to. Now we know that some of these things are now against the law.

Has that changed our position – not really. I have no wish to deprive people we support of their human rights.

But I do want to keep them safe and to do that we continue to communicate for all we are worth, be as creative as we can, but we will not break the rules and we will follow the guidance.....and if we have to prioritise we are going to go with keeping people safe and well every time.