



Disability Sheffield



# Developing an emergency COVID-19 personal assistant register

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In February 2020, Disability Sheffield, a disabled people's user-led organisation, was involved in discussions with the council as they began to prepare a response to the anticipated COVID-19 pandemic. Disability Sheffield was aware that there would potentially be an issue for people who employed their own personal assistants (PAs), if care and support was not available due to PAs shielding, self-isolating or having their own caring responsibilities. In response, and in discussion with Sheffield Council, the development of an emergency COVID-19 PA register was agreed to provide emergency PA cover when people needed it most.

In order to test if there were PAs available, Disability Sheffield contacted all the PAs and employers who had accessed Skills for Care funded training over the previous year to ask if they would be available to provide emergency PA support, if required.



**“Running the emergency PA register on a smaller scale has ensured a bespoke approach and allowed for one-to-one discussions that otherwise may not be possible. There is definitely potential for this to be developed even further.”**

Emily Morton  
Chief Executive, Disability Sheffield

Based on the positive responses of potentially available PAs, a separate emergency COVID-19 PA register was developed, alongside the normal register. Those who expressed interest initially were contacted, along with all PAs registered on the existing PA register, with a link to an online registration form to help streamline the process.

Disability Sheffield matched 34 PAs to 16 different individual employers through the emergency PA register, with an additional six individual employers also supported to find PA support elsewhere. At the height of the lockdown earlier this year, there were 35 PAs actively available to provide emergency support as and when needed.

Following additional publicity to encourage PAs to get involved, 28 new PAs registered on the emergency PA register and the normal PA register.

The result of this has been that people living with disabilities have been able to access the assistance they require during COVID-19, in spite of the challenges posed by the pandemic.

### Top tips for establishing an emergency PA register



#### **Make the process as simple as possible**

To make the process simple Disability Sheffield identified PAs with the appropriate skills and availability and matched them to the IE's needs and requirements. Disability Sheffield then contacted the PAs to ask if they were interested and if they would be happy for us to pass their contact details to the IEs.



#### **Be realistic with what you can achieve**

Not every organisation has all the resources they need to roll out an initiative on a mass scale and it is easy to want to do everything with the best of intentions, however, it is important to identify any limits and adapt your approach.



#### **Establish clear communication channels**

As part of the process, you need to ensure that communication between individual employers and PAs is as straightforward as possible. You can do this by setting up a system that means that they have a direct line of communication with each other, pending agreement from individuals for details to be shared.

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