PEER SUPPORT & REFLECTIVE PRACTICE SESSIONS

&

LEADING IN A CRISIS WORKSHOP

REPORT AND EVALUATION

1. INTRODUCTION

This document reports on and evaluates the Peer Support and Reflective Practice Sessions and the "Leading in a Crisis" workshops commissioned by the Scottish Government. In collaboration with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), the Scottish Government committed to providing leadership support and development for senior/strategic leaders in Social Care and Social Work as part of a package of wellbeing support provided to the sector. This report presents the outcomes of the Peer Support and Reflective Practice sessions first, before moving on to present the outcomes of the "Leading in a Crisis" workshops and concluding with emerging themes and considerations.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The National Leadership Development Programme (NLDP) is a collaborative development of the Scottish Government and NHS Education for Scotland (NES) in partnership with continuous engagement from key stakeholders across health, adult social care and adult social work sectors. . It aims to provide leadership development opportunities and support that meets the specific leadership needs for this workforce.

During 2021/22, the Scottish Government introduced a package of measures to support the Health, Social Care and Social Work workforce over the winter pressures period. As part of a wider package of wellbeing support, the NLDP committed to offer leadership support and development for senior leaders, specifically in Social Care and Social Work.

To deliver this leadership support and development, two programmes were commissioned:

1. Peer Support and Reflective Practice Sessions
2. "Leading in a Crisis" workshops

Both events focused on using personal and leadership capability to support individual and team wellbeing and resilience whilst leading in a crisis. Both programmes placed an emphasis on the values and behaviours of compassionate and empathetic leaders who empower others and who are committed to public service values.

In seeking to engage a leadership development facilitator to partner and collaborate with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) in designing and delivering these programmes, Kinharvie was appointed having successfully tendered for the commission.

3. PEER SUPPORT AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE SESSIONS

3.1. PURPOSE, AGENDA AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Reflective practice is the foundation stone of professional development, helping leaders to make meaning from experience and transforming insights into practical strategies for personal and professional growth.

Each Peer Support & Reflective Practice session aimed to provide a safe, protected and facilitated space to support leaders in critically reflecting on their leadership practice during the Covid-19 pandemic. The intention was to provide a unique opportunity for leaders to share their pandemic leadership stories and experiences, with the aim of growing and developing leadership practice. Sessions were conversational in approach with delegates pursuing leadership interests and concerns related to the purpose below.

Purpose

To critically reflect on leadership experience during the Covid-19 crisis, to build leadership capability by making meaning and transforming insights into practical strategies for personal and professional growth.

Agenda

- Leading during the pandemic – how was it, really?
- Lessons learned
    - Self-leadership and wellbeing
    - Staff/team leadership and wellbeing
- Resourcing leadership capability
    - Looking back, what was possible
    - Looking ahead, what is needed
- Reflection on learning and commitment to action

Learning Outcomes

- A better understanding of the experience of leading during the pandemic and an appreciation of the key lessons learned
- A greater sense of being supported, experiencing your own wellbeing at work as being attended to
- Increased motivation to use your leadership capability in ways that support and promote the wellbeing of your team
- A fuller understanding of how to develop and adapt your leadership behaviour and use appropriate styles of leadership in crisis situations
- Enhanced ability to demonstrate compassionate leadership, which in turn will support workforce wellbeing and improve outcomes.

3.2. ATTENDANCE FIGURES

The general interest in attending a Reflective Practice sessions was good with a total of 134 people requesting a place. The following points based on Table 1. are worth highlighting:

- To ensure psychological safety and to help participants engage, a maximum of 12 places was allocated to each event.
- Attempts were made to offer out places cancelled at the last minute, but it was not always possible to fill these at such short notice.
- A significant percentage of people (36%) did not show up on the day of some events, especially towards the end of the series of sessions – this is thought to be due to the impact of increased Covid case numbers, creating a staffing crisis within services.
- Approximately, two thirds attended from Social Care and one third from Social Work.
- The majority of those who requested a place at a Reflective Practice Session, also asked to attend a "Leading in a Crisis" workshop. Due to the high demand for both sets of events, most people were offered a place at only one event.
- All people who requested a place at a Reflective Practice session were offered one or placed on a waiting list for separate SSSC events - therefore there are no waiting list numbers for these events.
- 54 people who requested a place on a Reflective Practice session were not in senior leadership roles so were not prioritised for these sessions. They were advised that they are on a waiting list for sessions to be delivered by the SSSC in 2022/23 and were contacted to ask if they would like to attend these sessions.
- 3 people overall were unable to engage with Zoom or had to find an alternative method of logging on such as a smartphone, tablet or PC.

Table 1.

Date of event	Number that confirmed attendance	Number that did attend	Number that originally confirmed then cancelled before the day	Number that did not turn up on the day	Number that attended from Social Care	Number that attended from Social Work
21/2/22	9	8	n/a	1	8	0
22/2/22	7	5	n/a	2	3	2
23/2/22	10	7	2	1	5	2
24/2/22	8	6	n/a	2	2	4
14/3/22	12	6	n/a	6	1	5
16/3/22	13	9	2	4	7	2
21/3/22	10	4	3	6	3	1
28/3/22	11	4	n/a	7	2	2
Total	**80**	**49**	**7**	**29**	**31**	**18**

3.3. PRE-EVENT SURVEY RESPONSES

To gain insight into motivation for attending a Peer Support and Reflective Practice session, as well as perspectives on how participants saw themselves prior to attending the event, each delegate was invited to respond to a pre-event survey. In total, 41 responses were received

When asked *"What motivates you to give up time to be part of this session?"*, typical responses included:

- "I feel that as we are moving forward from the pandemic and starting a new year this is a perfect time to share experiences and spend some time acknowledging what we have gone through, how we got through it, why we made the decisions we did (what were the drivers for those) and what would/could we have done differently."
- "I feel we have all been working in crisis mode for nearly 2 years now and we have lost the ability to be creative and forward thinking about how our services can be developed and adapted to meet the changes that have taken place since Covid 19. Although we all have lots to do and are busy. I think we need to make time to reflect and help us refocus."
- "I am interested in hearing from other colleagues as to their experiences of the past two years."
- "Taking time to stand still and reflect for self rather than for team and organisation with a belief that shared reflection can create critical learning for future self."
- "Good opportunity to take time to reflect on the pandemic and the significant impact this has had on Social Work as well as personally. We are used to managing crisis in Social Work and most people will have 'just go on with it' without much time to pause and reflect on practice and changes to this as result of COVID-19."
- "To share professional challenges and celebrate successes together."
- "Working throughout the pandemic has proven to be really challenging, as we emerge and look towards brighter days ahead. I welcome the opportunity to meet with peers across the sector, to share our experiences and how these can positively influence change and future direction of social care."
- "An opportunity to reflect on what has been operationally the toughest two years and try to get an understanding on why I made some decisions and how others came to perhaps different conclusions when faced with many unknown and uncharted problems."
- "A real need for higher level personal reflection and genuine peer support - some refresh in my personal energy would be great. I'm feeling isolated at times now in my organisation as we move into a different aspect of the pandemic in Scotland yet impact on our sector is still causing pressures. So, this is the start of my own personal (keep going) recovery plan?"

When presented with ***"Peer support sessions provide a safe space for mutual exchange as we reflect on our leadership experience: What do you hope to gain?"***, typical responses included:

- "Some support through shared/similar experience. Any tips on strategies to improve quality assurance in workplace and to ensure personal wellbeing whilst dealing with so much challenge".
- "I hope to learn from others sharing scenarios and how I can make improvements to my practice which I can share with others".
- "I think to be around people that experience the same degree of pressure and responsibility within their roles is good to do. I am sure that I will perhaps feel vindicated as to how I have felt at times during the period - as others may have felt a similar sense of having less control and influence over matters. I hope to gain some insights that may lead me to exploring some other conversations/situations that may be helpful in supporting my growth as a leader".
- "Shared recognition of our struggles, the pressures, a whole range of challenging feelings and impacts on self, colleagues, people we support, Organisation, sector wide - what it's really been like working in a high-level accountable role".
- "Ideas and shared feelings/reflections".
- "Peer support can be very effective in obtaining different and novel perspectives. I certainly hope to gain new insights which will be of value to me".
- "Insight into how others have coped - what worked well and what didn't. Space to consider moving out of a crisis leadership mode to one of 'new normal'".
- "A safe space to reflect and enhance skills. To learn from others. Come up with solutions to common difficulties, perhaps".
- "An opportunity to stop, think and listen to others experience and coping strategies".
- "Insights into peers practice experiences and a connection with others. Access to some strategies to try and test myself. Reassurance and reinforcement that boosts my confidence".
- "Refreshment, affirmation new ideas".
- "First of all, the opportunity to share with others is always welcome and secondly, I am interested to hear from others and to offer and receive support from them".

Responses to, ***"What needs to happen for the session to be a valuable use of your time?",*** included:

- "Engagement and participation from those attending with facilitation that promotes rich conversations".
- "Excellent facilitation and communicative participants".
- "Honest conversations".
- "Open, honest dialogue and maybe some helpful hints and tips to take back to my workplace".
- "Protected space for reflection and listening".
- "Colleagues need to be open to share. A safe (non-judgmental) space needs to be created for this to happen".
- "I would like to hear from others sharing what worked what didn't during the Pandemic and I hope to learn new strategies that I can share with my teams".
- "Learning and identifying potential goals for the future".

- "To come away with something new that adds value to my role as a leader, no matter how big or small-a light bulb moment is always good!".
- "I either need to see if what I am currently doing is heading in the right direction or any inspirational different ideas".
- "I think any time out to focus, hear that you are not alone in what has been happening and gaining more information is not wasted time".
- "For there to be practical examples of how to lead in a crisis".
- "Someone with experience and knowledge to lead so I can take away better practises".
- "Structured reflection".
- "A safe space for honest exchanges of experience thoughts and feelings".

It is evident from this sample of responses that there is a significant need for leaders to find time and space to step back and reflect with their peers on what has clearly been a very challenging two years.

To get a baseline of how delegates perceived themselves, the following questions were presented, with the results detailed below:

"Please give your responses to the following statements on a scale of 1 – 5 where 1 is low and 5 is high".

a) **How would you rate your self-awareness as a leader in a crisis?**

1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
0	0	9	29	3

Average = 3.85

b) **How would you rate your current sense of wellbeing?**

1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
0	9	12	14	6

Average = 3.41

c) **How would you rate your current capacity to support your workforce/those you lead?**

1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
0	0	12	24	5

Average = 3.83

3.4. POST-EVENT EVALUATION RESPONSES

Having attended a Peer Support and Reflective Practice session, each delegate was invited to complete a post event survey. The total number of responses received was eight. Responses to the question **"What is the most significant learning from the Peer Support and Reflective Practice Session that has stayed with you?"**, were:

- "Helpful opportunity to pause and reflect, and to share learning. Protected time to do so is invaluable."
- "I learned that my leadership in the pandemic crisis has not been erratic and chaotic - but comparatively creative, positive, proactive and effective from my organisations perspective which was a re-empowering experience. I recognised before the session that I had felt really disempowered in my leadership role by all the uncertainty of constant external changes brought about by the waves of the Pandemic and the impact these waves have had on our people and the business I lead. By being given an opportunity to reflect on my own feelings and experiences, and by listening to others' feelings, experiences and challenges, I had a measure of how I have performed as a leader. I gave myself a break for the first time in two years and have concluded that I actually led well in the face of such unprecedented challenge."
- "That the feelings and challenges I felt were not unusual and others experienced the same as well as similar frustrations."
- "Small conversations matter."
- "The sharing of issues/feelings about leadership through this difficult period has stayed with me ...."
- "Reflection on what moving out of the office / team space has meant in terms of significant loss of connection to colleagues' lives - impacting on knowing what is going on for people outside of work and opportunities for mutual support and understanding."
- "Probably taking the time to acknowledge the stress and pressure of Leading in a pandemic. I took away lots of things including: thinking about things being less predictable and us having less control, than in the past. A reminder to prioritise self-care."
- "The opportunity to reflect on the last 2 years with those who work in a variety of sectors. It was reassuring to hear that the challenges were faced across all partner agencies."

When asked **"Do you anticipate your leadership practice will change in any way because of your participation in the Peer Support and Reflective Practice Session?"**,

Participant Responses	
Yes	62%
No	38%

Of the 62% who replied, *'Yes'*, reasons provided included:

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- "I recognised during the session I had become controlled by 'crisis' which has seemed to dominate every agenda for so long now and had come to define my leadership role in the pandemic so in the session I freed myself from this 'bind' and I have taken away of feeling of liberation which has helped me to look at things in a different way."
- "Supporting more collaborative and reflective conversations with peers in the sector as a way to link with others."
- 'I really liked the honesty that was shared through the session, and I will encourage my team to be equally as honest in their approach."
- "Making the most of time before and after face-to-face meetings - recognising the validity of having "a chat" even if it feels less productive in terms of specific task completion."
- "It was a good reminder to stop and re focus, breathe and be more gentle with myself for not having all of the answers or solutions to what is such a challenging time/context."

Of the 38% who replied, **'No'**, reasons provided included:

- "The perspective it provided on how the voluntary sector works compared to HSCP/NHS. The speed, pace and demand to make swift decisions on the frontline of NHS/HSCP via a top-down approach compared to the bottom-up approach in the voluntary sector would not be achievable at the current time unless there was a system wide change of approach by senior management which appears unlikely to occur anytime soon. It is unfortunate but the style of management expected within a HSCP/NHS does not work as flexibly as the voluntary sector would appear to be from the discussions."
- "It actually confirmed to me most of my decisions and practice - this session has validated that for me."

In a further series of evaluation questions, respondents were invited to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the following statements:

d) I used this session as a safe space to critically reflect on, and learn from, my leadership experience during the Covid-19 pandemic:

Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
3	5	0	0	0

100% either 'Totally Agree' or 'Agree'

e) I have a better understanding of the key lessons I learned during the Covid-19 crisis:

Kinharvie

Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
0	6	2	0	0

75% 'Agree', 25% 'Neither Agree/Disagree'

f) The session was supportive and provided me with a greater sense of my own wellbeing at work being attended to:

Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
1	7	0	0	0

100% either 'Totally Agree' or 'Agree'

g) I gained increased motivation to support and promote the wellbeing of my team:

Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
0	6	2	0	0

75% 'Agree', 25% 'Neither Agree/Disagree'

h) I have a better understanding of how to adapt my leadership behaviours in a crisis situation:

Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
0	3	5	0	0

38% 'Agree', 62% 'Neither Agree/Disagree'

From the narrative provided by respondents during sessions and in the evaluation feedback, clearly participants are still working and leading through crisis. Therefore, a reasonable conclusion that could be drawn from the table above '5 - Neither Agree/ Disagree' rating response to this question, is that respondents are still reflecting on and considering 'how to' adapt their leadership behaviours whilst under pressure.

i) I have a greater appreciation of the value of compassionate leadership in supporting workforce wellbeing:

Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
0	8	0	0	0

Kinharvie

100% 'Agree".

Having evaluated the session, we then asked participants to re-visit the baseline questions (these were first presented in the pre-event survey):

"Please give your responses to the following statements on a scale of 1 – 5 where 1 is low and 5 is high".

j) How would you rate your self-awareness as a leader in a crisis?

1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
0	0	1	6	1

Average = **4**. The average for the pre-event survey was **3.8**.   *How would you rate your current sense of wellbeing?*

1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
0	0	2	4	2

Average = **4**. The average for the pre-event survey was **3.41**.

k) How would you rate your current capacity to support your workforce/those you lead?

1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
0	0	3	4	1

Average = **3.75**. The average for the pre-event survey was **3.83**.

From the responses received (in tables above) to the post session baseline questions, both the questions relating to self-awareness and sense of wellbeing respectively, show an Improvement. In contrast, there is a fractionally lower percentage rating in responses from participants when asked to reflect on their capacity to support those that they lead, from pre to post survey.

Lastly, we invited respondents to indicate whether they believed it would be useful for more of this type of session to be provided into the future. All 8 responses are detailed below:

Do you think it would be useful to offer more of this type of session for senior leaders in Social Care and Social Work and/or for others in the sector? Please explain your response.

- "Yes - for opportunity for support and time to reflect. Might find it challenging to get attendance due to workload and staffing pressures, unfortunately these types of sessions tend to become a luxury rather priority, despite their importance."
- "Yes - for me, any senior leadership role carries a high level of feeling really responsible for getting it right for others. For me, this creates self-doubt around how well I'm doing in practice - especially when things are really challenging and as a result, I isolate myself a wee bit. Supervision and appraisal helps, but I benefitted in a different way from a well facilitated session with my peers - openly & honestly

sharing feelings & experiences & ideas - which enabled me to include myself in striving to get right for everyone (not others)."

- "Yes, the ability to listen to other similar people doing similar roles has huge benefit even if it's to just validate what you are doing and thinking."

- "Yes, I do think this would be very useful. I felt small support groups were a really great way of connecting. I would suggest though, feedback survey sooner would have been good as, like everything, it feels a very long time ago and I can't, if I am honest, remember everything, but I do remember that I was struck by the small numbers and the ability for people to listen to each other in a safe and supportive space."

- "I do - the opportunity to have a space to discuss with like-minded people that undertake similar roles and responsibilities is important.'

- "Yes- I think we have become increasingly task focused and isolated in our work. This puts pressure on leaders who then pass that down to the workforce. Opportunities to step out of that and have time and be facilitated to reflect, think, talk openly about the challenges and things that help and work well are important."

- "Yes. It recognises, that to keep social care organisations strong and available to play their part in Scotland for those they support now and in the future, Senior Leaders must be seen as one of the key parts of this happening. Their well-being and ability to Lead is crucial. Already we are seeing senior Leaders/CEO's leaving and maybe with more space and support sessions, this could help."

- "Yes definitely. However, it is critical that it as wide a representation as possible with front line, middle and senior managers."

4. "LEADING IN A CRISIS" WORKSHOPS

4.1. PURPOSE, AGENDA AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The "Leading in a Crisis" workshop starts with acknowledging these are not 'normal' times to be in leadership. Leaders In Social Care and Social Work have endured over two years of extreme challenge as they have attempted to lead their way through the Covid-19 emergency. As leaders, they have been catapulted into an extended period of crisis where leadership capability has been tested in ways we could never have imagined. The pandemic has created an environment characterised by fear, uncertainty, unpredictability, and an extraordinary pace of change. These are exceptional times, requiring exceptional leadership.

The workshop principles state, "If we are to be effective as leaders, we must first lead ourselves and do so with compassion. Working out how to do that during a crisis is no easy task. If we are to learn and develop as leaders and build resilience, it's essential to take time out to critically reflect on our leadership practice".

Delivered over three hours, the workshop provided a combination of content and small group discussion. It was an opportunity for leaders to stand back and explore, with curiosity, their lived experience of leading during the crisis. The workshop aimed to create a safe and confidential space for participants to share leadership experiences, understand what is needed to lead successfully in times of crisis and explore strengths as well as areas for development.

Purpose

To understand what is needed to successfully lead with compassion during a crisis and to reflect on personal leadership capability, including strengths and areas for leadership development.

Agenda

- Compassionate leadership in a crisis
- My pandemic leadership – what worked/needs developing
- Self-leadership – strengths/areas for development
- Facilitating wellbeing
- Leading others to lead
- Reflection on learning and commitment to action

Outcomes

- Understanding what it means to lead with compassion and the types of leadership needed in a crisis
- A greater appreciation of your personal experience of leading during the pandemic, including strengths and areas for leadership development
- An experience of solidarity with other leaders, sharing leadership experience in a safe and confidential space
- Sharing with others how to facilitate self-leadership and well-being of staff/teams

- Greater understanding on how to lead others to lead
- An appreciation of your future support needs in leading with resilience and how you can secure and sustain this support post-pandemic
- Understanding the role of supervision, coaching and mentoring in a crisis for supporting and strengthening self/staff/teams

4.2.   ATTENDANCE FIGURES

The general interest in attending a "Leading in a Crisis" workshop was good with a total of 78 people requesting a place. The following points based on Table 2 below, are worth highlighting:

- To ensure psychological safety and to help participants engage, a maximum of 12 places was allocated to each event
- Attempts were made to offer out places cancelled at the last minute, but these were not always able to be filled at such short notice
- A significant percentage of people (56%) did not show up on the day of some events, especially towards the end of the series of sessions – this is thought to be due to the impact of increased Covid case numbers, creating a staffing crisis within services in March 2022.
- Most people who requested a place at these workshops also asked to attend a Peer Support and Reflective Practice Session. Due to the high demand for both sets of events, most people were offered a place at only one event.
- Not all people who requested a place at this workshop were offered one. 48 people are on a waiting list for similar events in the future.
- 55 people who requested a place were not in senior leadership roles so were not prioritised for these sessions. They have been advised that they are on a waiting list for sessions to be delivered by the SSSC in 2022/23 and have been contacted to ask if they would like to attend these sessions.
- 2 people were not able to engage with Zoom or had to find an alternative method of logging on.

Table 2.

Date of event	No. that confirmed attendance	No. that did attend	No. that cancelled before the day	No. that did not turn up on the day	No. that attended from Social Care	No. that attended from Social Work	Wait list
23/3/22	10	4	4	6	1	3	16
24/3/22	9	1	6	7	1	0	12
31/3/22	11	7	2	4	3	1	20
Total	**30**	**12**	**12**	**17**	**8**	**4**	**48**

4.3.   PRE-EVENT SURVEY RESPONSES

To gain insight into motivation for attending a 'Leading in a Crisis' workshop as well as perspectives on how participants saw themselves prior to attending the event, each delegate was invited to respond to a pre-event survey. In total, 41 responses to the four questions were received.

When asked **"What motivates you to give up time to be part of this session?"**, the responses from all who completed the survey (10 respondents) were:

- "To strengthen and develop current leadership style and skills in relation to crisis management - events - occurrences. To continue to lead within a team despite the immediate or outside factors that can impact client care, staff morale and compliance requirements".
- "I would like to improve my leadership skills when working through crisis or situations that may stretch me. I feel taking time to personally reflect will help to move on and adapt to working life again and embrace the changes".
- "I guess I want the chance to reflect on my leadership through the crisis and see if there's anything more I can do".
- "A couple of years before the start of pandemic I had the opportunity to complete "You are a Collaborative Leader Programme" including Coaching Sessions at Kinharvie; During Pandemic I found myself consistently going back to my notes & active learning to equip myself & support others over the intense challenges faced by the social care sector in particular. This opportunity to reflect & share the learning further was particularly motivating".
- "Keen to be involved in conversations that develop frames and ideas around leadership based on values and working in complexity and crisis. Keen to hear other's thoughts/ reflections".
- "It has been a challenging few years and work has been very difficult and to some extent taking over my own time, so thought it would be good to explore this a bit further with others to see how they are managing".
- "To be a better leader and to look at what I can do to achieve this. I want to ensure that I give my best to those I lead and to be a good role model, coach & mentor to others".
- "Despite the many and varied pressures on time, I think it is important to stop from time-to-time and reflect. I believe that this is one of those times, and I hope that Mr Cummings and the other participants can help me to reflect and improve".
- "Seeing if there were changes I could make to be more effective leader".

Participants were asked **"What do you hope to gain?"**, the following responses were provided:

- "Direction and guidance in effective leadership techniques and knowledge in effectively leading a team".
- "A better understanding of actions and reactions. To share feelings with others that are similar".
- "To learn from other leaders working at my level in health and social care".
- "Reflection / enhanced self-awareness on meeting the expectations of others in my approach to Leadership during the crisis of Pandemic".

- "Links to frames or evidence around leadership".
- "Opportunity to think about the particular skills required".
- "Sharing of what others have gone through over the pandemic and what they have done to support staff".
- "A better understanding of the impact that different styles/traits of leadership make, particularly in a crisis".
- "Improved understanding and self-awareness".
- "Some tips for be a more effective leader".

When asked *"What do you have to offer?"*, participants responded as follows:

- "Existing skills and experience - reflections on what has worked well for us and what didn't work so well".
- "Mindfulness in the importance of effective leadership and support within teams".
- "Personal experiences, some good practice examples but also areas I would change if faced with again".
- "My passion is leading and developing teams to achieve positive outcomes for people. I can inspire and motivate people to be and do their best. I am passionate about culture and values."
- "Experience gained in active compassionate listening; importance of highlighting context as well as finding & speaking truth".
- "Open and curious about this and keen to listen to others".
- "Sharing of my experiences, risks taken and families supported".
- "My own personal experience over 30 years in social care settings".
- "My own experiences".
- "Experience of running critical services in challenging times".

Responses to*, "What needs to happen for the session to be a valuable use of your time?",* were:

- "For me to come away from the session with ideas for growth and measures I can implement within our company to effectively manage and have a positive impact on our team, clients and company".
- "Involvement from everyone, to take away some learning and be left feeling positive".
- "For it not to be a moaning session".
- "Recognition of how ill prepared the whole country & health & care systems were to address the crisis while acknowledging being a leader is not just a job title but more about who you are and how you relate to others".
- "Some structure, alignment between purpose and content/ process. A wee bit of laughter".
- "Sharing of issues and solutions".
- "To have learned something to impact on my leadership skills and implement in my practice".
- "I leave feeling validated, reassured and enabled to improve further by building on the wisdom and experiences of others".
- "No distractions"

4.4.   POST EVENT EVALUATION

Of the 12 participants who attended a 'Leading in a Crisis' workshop, only 1 completed the evaluation. Considering the number of confirmed participants who then cancelled in advance of the session or did not show on the day (as detailed above in 4.2, Table 2) it is evident that social care and social work staff were working under significant pressures at this time, and this has impacted their capacity to provide feedback as requested.

The responses from the 1 participant who did feedback are presented below:

a)   ***Overall, how did you experience the 'Leading in a Crisis' workshop?***

- Very positive. Nice to hear other ideas and perspectives. Having the time and space to speak openly.

b)   ***What is the most significant learning from the session that has stayed with you?***

- Ensuring time is made for staff for one-to-one meetings/support on a regular basis.

c)   ***Do you anticipate your leadership practice will change in any way because of your participation in the session?***

Yes – 1 total
No – 0 total

d)   ***If yes, in what ways?***

- See answer for b

e)   ***I was able to use the session as a safe space to critically reflect on and learn from my experience of leading during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis:***

Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
1	0	0	0	0

f)   ***I have a better understanding of the key lessons I learned during the Covid-19 crisis:***

Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
0	1	0	0	0

g)   *The session was supportive and provided me with a greater sense of my own wellbeing at work being attended to:*

Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
1	0	0	0	0

h)   *I have a greater appreciation of compassionate leadership and its value as an essential leadership capability for supporting workforce wellbeing:*

Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
0	1	0	0	0

i)   *I have a better understanding of how to adapt my leadership behaviours when facing a crisis:*

Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
0	1	0	0	0

j)   *With respect to leading self, I have grown in awareness about my strengths as well as areas for development:*

Totally Agree	Agree		Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
0	1		0	0	0

k)   *I gained increased motivation to support and promote the wellbeing of my team:*

Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
1	0	0	0	0

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l) *I gained some practical strategies for developing personal and professional growth:*

Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
0	1	0	0	0

Having evaluated the session, we then asked participants to re-visit the following baseline questions (first presented in the pre-event survey):

"Please give your responses to the following statements on a scale of 1 – 5 where 1 is low and 5 is high".

m) *How would you rate level of confidence to lead in a crisis?*

1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
0	0	0	1	0

n) *How would you rate your self-awareness as someone leading during in a crisis?*

1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
0	0	0	1	0

o) *How would you rate your understanding of best approaches to adopt when leading in a crisis?*

1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
0	0	0	1	0

p) *How would you rate your sense of wellbeing now, having led through the pandemic crisis?*

1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
0	0	0	1	0

q) *Do you think it would be useful to offer more of this type of session for senior leaders in social care and social work and/or for others in the sector? Please explain your response.*

- Yes - it gives Managers time to reflect on their own experiences and leadership

5.   THEMES AND CONSIDERATIONS

The following themes were exhibited in both the Peer Support and Reflective Practice sessions and the 'Leading in a Crisis' workshops.

5.1.   Trauma

During the Peer Support and Reflective Practice conversations and the 'Leading in a Crisis' workshop, there was repeated mention of how traumatic the past 2 years have been:

- In care contexts where multiple deaths were experienced, there was trauma at multiple levels.
- Leaders expressed feeling exposed to every level of trauma due to their role in supporting management, staff and families.
- The scale of the challenge in responding effectively and professionally to government guidance created its own trauma.
- High and persistent levels of change and uncertainty over an extended period was traumatic.
- For some, being looked upon by staff to give answers where there were none, was traumatic.
- Hearing other leaders discuss the traumatic nature of the past 2 years during these sessions caused a handful of leaders to come to realise, for the first time, they too were experiencing trauma.

5.2.   Fatigue

Having experienced the Covid-19 pandemic for two years, many participants expressed a universal experience of fatigue.

Some participants expressed the view that 'moving from pandemic to endemic is exhausting, worse than the first lockdown. It feels relentless, and still ongoing'.

Another participant said, 'There is a level of fatigue now which leaves people doubting, especially now compared to the first lockdown. There's a need to stop for a bit to allow people to breathe'.

Some leaders have concern for how much is being asked of staff and management. There is the view that staff have been asked to 'go the extra mile' for an extended period and there is discomfort at asking for more given the degree of fatigue and weariness. Some expressed concern that they 'have had to ask staff to do more and more but can't always reward them for this'.

5.3.   Legitimate Time Out

Many of those who participated in the sessions appeared to need the opportunity to have time and space for reflection. Whilst this was a stated and known need of leaders, many had not found the time or opportunity to appropriately meet their need. The chance to avail of this opportunity was seen by leaders as a legitimate reason to be away from their role. There is the view from

many leaders that such time away from their leadership practice is a luxury. Many understand the value of reflective practice but the demands of the day-to-day job, especially in the face of a crisis, means that such development spaces easily fall by the wayside.

That said, the advertising of these events did generate significant interest. It would appear the backing of the Scottish Government together with the collaboration of SSSC and the fact the sessions were professionally facilitated has sent a message about the importance of time for reflection – **the impression was given that being able to add such an event to a leader's diary created a legitimate reason and 'permission' for time out.**

In concluding the session, some participants expressed a commitment to a regular practice of taking time out for reflection. Additionally, some leaders experienced the session as being so effective, they realised this was something they needed to extend to their own staff as they too have been too busy to reflect and make sense of their pandemic experience.

5.4.   Perspective and Validation

The sessions supported leaders to speak openly and honestly about their experience during the pandemic. Having the opportunity to listen to the stories of other leaders proved to be a significant instance of validation for several delegates. Working tirelessly, and frequently experiencing the loneliness of being in leadership, many participants had no way of gauging their leadership performance. This can generate self-doubt as leaders busy handling their own crisis have no way of understanding or comparing their performance against peers or in reference to sector norms and expectations.

Stepping out of their day-to-day role and being in conversation with other leaders appears to have a significant impact in terms of leaders gaining perspective and validation on their performance. There was a sense of relief and pride when leaders heard the stories of others. There was a realisation about how similar their leadership challenges and dilemmas were and a collective recognition by the end of the session that 'we have done an amazing job in the last 2 years'.

Validation of feelings was another important aspect of these sessions. As well as acknowledging the degree of trauma, there was frustration, anger, anxiety, fear, stress and feeling of being pressurised.

In particular, anger was expressed at perceived inequalities in the support provided nationally. This was difficult for leaders to manage e.g., not all staff in a service were eligible for the additional £500 payment. To manage this feeling of inequality, some leaders reported organisations felt there was no choice but to finance the 'shortfall'.

In some cases, leaders expressed feelings of guilt at another sense of inequality. Depending on role and the nature of the services provided, some leaders / staff were able to work from home and away from the 'coalface'. There was guilt that their pandemic leadership experience didn't appear as stressful as those delivering frontline care.

5.5.   Solidarity Through Shared Learning

In facilitating these sessions, particular effort was taken in creating a space for participants to feel safe, open and engaged. In creating a psychologically safe space, participants were able to share authentically and with candour. As stated earlier, hearing from other leaders generated both perspective and validation. As a consequence of hearing the pandemic leadership stories from others, there was much learning that generated a sense of solidarity and connection.

Participants expressed how useful it was to speak to other leaders, especially those in different types of services or from other parts of the country.

Many discussed the sense of pressure in being seen as the one to provide 'the answers'. Through the conversation, these leaders came to understand that 'it's ok to not have the answers as a leader'. **Rather, they can lead the process to collaborate in discovering answers.**

On reflecting on the stories shared, there was a realisation of how much resilience leaders possess. These same stories left several leaders leaving the session feeling inspired, engaged and connected.

5.6. Elements Specific to the Peer Support and Reflective Practice sessions

5.6.1. Mitigating Isolation

A number of those attending the Peer Support and Reflective Practice sessions commented on the lonely nature of being in leadership and how the opportunity of attending such a session was the ideal opportunity to mitigate the sense of isolation. There was a real hunger to connect with other leaders and a great appetite for understanding how others experienced and coped with the challenges of leading during the pandemic. Many spoke of the importance of 'being there' for staff, which often involved suspending their own personal and professional needs, resulting in unintended isolation.

5.6.2. Resourcing Leadership Capability

Some leaders expressed how much their life and work balance were affected by the first lockdowns, where 'work took over' and family/social life was severely neglected. Leaders have developed over time, a greater capacity to prioritise and say 'no', so that some of this imbalance has been redressed – that said, a significant imbalance remains. Leaders reported a developing confidence in saying 'no' where necessary.

Leaders have also developed a greater capacity to choose the pace at which they operate, understanding how taxing it is to be in a perpetual state of panic and crisis. There has been learning about the need to slow down the pace of work as a means of self-preservation.

Leadership capability has also developed out of a growing sense of conviction about what really matters – as one person said, "keep the people at the centre and the right solutions will be found".

5.6.3. Personal Commitments as Result of Attendance

Some of the commitments that leaders took away from the session included:

- 'To share more of my authentic self with others'.
- 'I will do sessions like this with my own managers'.

- 'I will say "I don't know" more and be comfortable with this'.
- 'I will make more space in my diary'.
- 'My day will start with protected space for reflection'.
- 'Checking in with staff more often'.

5.7. Elements Specific to the 'Leading in a Crisis' Workshop

5.7.1. Compassionate Leadership

Leaders acknowledged the importance of really understanding what's affecting staff and service users and how challenging it is to find the space and time to do this. There is a genuine wish to 'be there' for staff which is inevitably compromised due to the nature of crisis. There is acknowledgement of general weariness amongst staff and concern about how much more staff can endure.

At the same time, leaders came to understand the 'tyranny of empathy' – where the capacity to feel for another person leaves a leader vulnerable to manipulation. Leaders have a delicate balance to manage with staff when it comes to support and challenge. Some staff may try to take advantage of a crisis and see themselves as beyond any challenge from leadership and management, manipulating the compassion of those in positions of authority as a way of avoiding accountability.

5.7.2. Compassion Fatigue

Some leaders were concerned not about too much compassion but about too little. "Have we stopped listening actively because we're so busy?" was a question posed, along with "are we experiencing compassion fatigue?". There was recognition of the importance of "the power of giving people space to be listened to" and that there is "a need to build time into the service for reflection – it's a necessity, not a luxury".

5.7.3. Support and Supervision

Leaders commented on their endeavours to ensure staff received the support they needed during the crisis and were pleased, on reflection, with what they achieved. There was not a similar degree of attention or support when it came to leaders themselves receiving the support they themselves needed from their own managers.

5.7.4. Key Learning

- "Beware the tyranny of empathy"
- "Important to take time out each morning to plan, need to focus time better".
- "Energised by discussion about self-leadership, need to re-do 360-degree feedback".
- "Good to meeting different people, enjoyed hearing different views"
- "This has been a gift"
- "This has been a really good experience".
- "I really enjoyed meeting new and completely different people".
- "I am reminded of all the things I know I need to do to in order to look after myself".
- "I need to find and use my nerve".
- "Learning about self-leadership is a lightbulb moment for me".

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- "The notion of leading with conscious, clean intent is inspiring"
- "Considering how to support my team in terms of their financial literacy as we enter the cost-of-living crisis is something I need to follow up"

5.7.5. Personal Commitments as a Result of Attendance

- "I commit to developing my self-awareness".
- "I will commit to a routine of reflection time".
- "I will be sure to give other people quality time for engagement".
- "I commit to giving my team regular time for reflection".
- "My take-away is to take time out for myself and for the team".

5.8 Key Considerations

5.8.1 Delivery

Having delivered both sets of sessions within short timescales and during a challenging period for the workforce, it may be sensible to consider appropriate lead in time for planning and scheduling along with date and time options that are best suited to the working arrangements of target participants. This may improve attendance on the day and reduce last minute dropout rates. Administration of these sessions was challenging, partially due to the nature of offering the two sessions at once, to the same audience and then managing the allocation process with many people being keen to attend both sessions. The limited number of spaces also presented a challenge in determining who took priority in securing a place on each session.

Regarding the content of sessions, there were some aspects and questions/ topics (for example 'Compassionate Leadership') that landed better than others and participants were particularly engaged and enthused about - it would be normal practice to review and tweak content where appropriate, and with this in mind, before delivering again.

5.8.2 Evaluation

Considering ongoing pressures on the workforce, as reflected in this report, gathering sufficient and conclusive evaluation data may continue to be a challenge. Ensuring questionnaires are not onerous and time consuming for respondents would be sensible, along with stressing the importance to participants of them providing post session feedback to justify future development offers, and continuously improve quality.

6. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. More of the Same

It is evident how challenging the last 2 years has been for leaders and how much they needed these events. Since only one person completed the "Leading in a Crisis" evaluation, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions beyond what was stated at each session, though the sentiment here

echoed what was said at the Peer support and Reflective Practice sessions - there was significant appreciation for a professionally facilitated space set up by the body responsible for sector support and development. The collaboration between the Scottish Government and SSSC provided gravitas to these events which supported leaders in committing to making time to attend. Not all of those who wanted to attend could do so, especially at the end of March when Covid levels were high resulting in higher attrition rates, especially for the "Leading in a Crisis" workshop.

The evaluation of the Peer Support and Reflective Practice sessions indicate the events were experienced as:

- a safe space to critically reflect on, and learn from, personal leadership experience during the Covid-19 pandemic
- facilitating a better understanding of the key lessons learned during the Covid-19 crisis
- supportive and providing delegates with a greater sense of their own wellbeing at work being attended to
- increasing personal motivation to support and promote the wellbeing of the teams for which leaders are responsible
- creating a greater appreciation of the value of compassionate leadership in supporting workforce wellbeing
- increasing self-awareness and sense of wellbeing

The overall feedback indicates high levels of need and these events reached only a fraction of the sectors leadership, meaning significant levels of unmet need potentially remain. Extending the offer of these events to leaders at all levels would contribute significantly to enhancing the wellbeing of staff in the sector.

6.2. Toolkit

Of those attending the Peer Support and Reflective Practice sessions and the 'Leading in a Crisis' workshop, a number mentioned how they would like to have a similar process for their staff (Peer Support and Reflective Practice) and/or to share the content of the workshop. It is recommended that there is exploration into how further support and/ or resources can be provided (ie a toolkit be designed) to help leaders in supporting their teams to reflect and learn from their peers locally and across the country, so the benefits can be cascaded and more widespread

6.3. Culture Change – From Luxury to Necessity

Of those attending these sessions, most commented on how they experienced the opportunity 'as a luxury'. If leaders are to do effective work and facilitate well-being of themselves and those whom they lead, opportunity and spaces for refection must be appreciated as a necessity rather than a luxury. In response to a delegate who described his organisation as *"working at 90 miles an hour with every minute of the day filled with diary appointments" the facilitator replied, "*If you don't have time to reflect on what you're doing, how will you know if the thing you're doing is what you ought to be doing?" Reflection supports leaders to grow in self-awareness so they

can be confident their leadership practice has conscious, clean intent – otherwise, they will be flying blind.

6.4.   In Conclusion

Prioritising the wellbeing and leadership development needs (combined) of social care and social work staff, and potentially more broadly across sectors, by offering more of the same (short, facilitated safe spaces) provides opportunities for leaders to 'sense make' together, improving opportunities for individual and collective recovery. Experiencing and contributing towards a session which is underpinned by an ethos of 'everyone Is doing the best they can with what they have at the present time' enables leaders to think and feel differently about their own responses to crises, and those of others around them.

Feeling safe to practice being honest, compassionate and non-judgemental in these types of sessions has the added benefit of supporting leaders to feel connected to one another, invariably improving culture and relationships (critical for collaborative, integrated working), and therefore beneficial for people accessing social care and social work support services in Scotland.