



Knowledge and Library Services (KLS)

COVID-19 Impact Stories (Knowledge Management)

Title: An **after action review (AAR)** led by the Knowledge and Library Services (KLS) helped draw out lessons learned from a project to develop and disseminate an eLearning module on psychological first aid during COVID-19.

User testimonial:

“Reflective practice is so important and yet is rarely done. The AAR was great for structured reflection, especially having an external facilitator. The format and questions worked really well and it allowed every member of the team to contribute. Identifying why the project worked and why it didn't was not only useful for our own professional development but has helped guide us in setting up the next project, ensuring it is even better.” **Jude Stansfield, National Adviser – Public Mental Health & Healthy Communities, Priorities and Programmes, Health Improvement**

Challenge:

PHE's Public Mental Health Team (Priorities & Programmes) led a project to prepare and disseminate a new online training programme to assist frontline workers in supporting the psychological wellbeing of people affected by COVID-19 ([Psychological first aid during COVID-19: eLearning module](#)). The work was coordinated by the Mental Health & Psychosocial Support Reference Cell, as part of PHE's national incident response, and worked with partners including NHS England, British Red Cross and academic experts.

The project required a mix of skills, knowledge and expertise and involved partnership working across PHE including people from Health Protection, Health Improvement, Business Development, Communications, and a Specialist Public Health Registrar. The team had to work remotely and at pace due to the demands of the coronavirus response.

The project lead wanted to review what had been learned during the project to inform the next steps as well as to feed into future activities.

Solution:

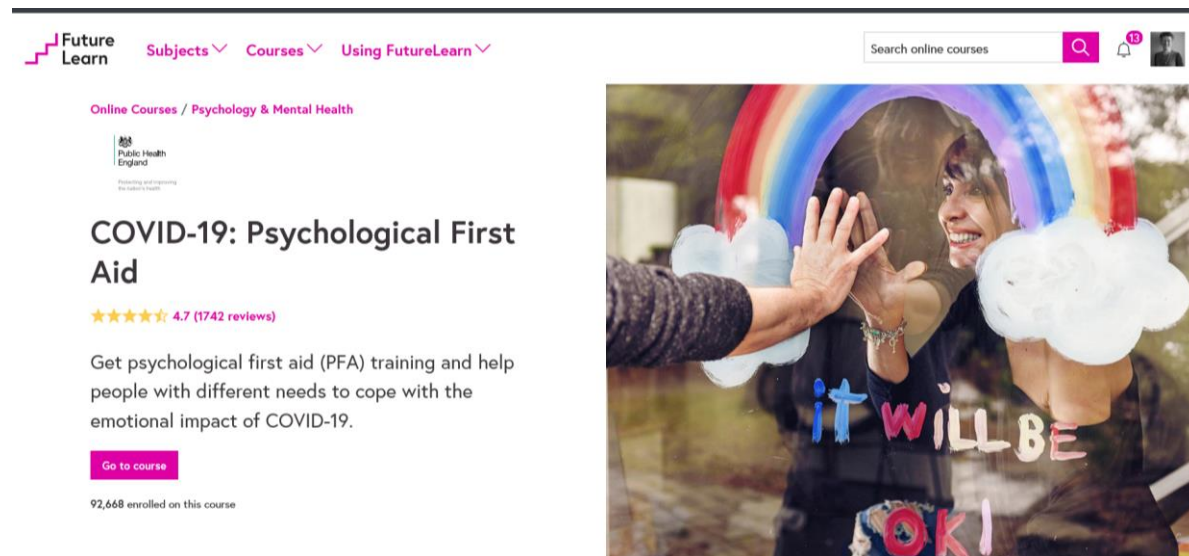
The project lead manager asked the KLS to facilitate an **AAR** of the project. The review brought together the whole project team (9 people) over 1.5 hours using MS Teams. (One person was absent, another who was unable to attend responded to the review questions by email prior to the meeting.) Notes were taken by a member of the Public Mental Health team who was not involved in the project.

Using the simple AAR format, the facilitator posed the following questions:

- What was supposed to happen? What actually happened? Why were there differences?
- What worked well and why? What didn't work so well and why?
- What would you do differently next time? / Next steps

Impact:

The review was a chance to **stop and reflect** before the project team dispersed and moved on to other priorities. It helped reach a **shared understanding** of the successes and challenges of the project. It was an opportunity for individuals to verbalise their thinking and experience in an open, honest, facilitated discussion; the process helped to **build trust** across the team. There was benefit in getting together and hearing the **different perspectives** of those working in other parts of PHE. Coming together was a means of **acknowledging and celebrating achievements**, something that was considered particularly important when everyone is working virtually from home.



The image is a screenshot of a FutureLearn course page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Future Learn' logo, 'Subjects', 'Courses', and 'Using FutureLearn' dropdown menus. A search bar and user profile icons are on the right. The main content area shows the course title 'COVID-19: Psychological First Aid' with a 4.7 star rating from 1742 reviews. A description states: 'Get psychological first aid (PFA) training and help people with different needs to cope with the emotional impact of COVID-19.' A 'Go to course' button is visible, along with the text '92,668 enrolled on this course'. To the right of the text is a photograph of a woman smiling and giving a high-five to another person. She is wearing a dark t-shirt with the text 'it WILL BE OK!' printed on it. The background of the photo features a large, colorful rainbow and white clouds.

Success factors:

Having an external facilitator allowed the whole project team to be involved and helped with probing *why?* things happened and challenging assumptions. A designated note taker to document the discussion helped the facilitator capture the key issues when summarising the notes and actions in the AAR notes template. The simple questions gave a structure to the discussion so a lot could be surfaced in a relatively short time and encouraged people to think about why things happened not just what happened. Circulating the questions in advance meant that team members came prepared and knew what to expect.

Lessons:

We have just set up a phase 2 project so are able to put some of the learning straight back into practice. This includes learning on team roles, external engagement, product design and the general project management process.

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