

Life Under Lockdown



A rapid assessment of the
impact of the lockdown on
young people in Leicester,
Leicestershire and Rutland



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Leicestershire Cares is an award winning, creative, results orientated charity. We broker partnerships and create opportunities across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland that enable the business sector to understand community needs, contribute to the growth of inclusive, safe communities and to support and inspire children and young people in their transition to the workplace.

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“My main concern is the inability to find work after the lockdown, because so many people have been made unemployed due to it... The lockdown also has heavy economic implications too so companies would be less likely to expand and take on new staff.”

Introduction

This summary presents the findings of Leicestershire Cares' rapid assessment of the impact that the Covid19 pandemic, lockdown and social distancing restrictions are having on vulnerable young people in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

We consulted with 28 young people from across our projects to explore how the lockdown was affecting them, the challenges they are facing, the support they had found useful and their concerns as the lockdown eases. The findings below include feedback from young people at risk of homelessness, with experience of the care system, who have a history of offending, and who are long-term unemployed.

Key findings:

- Young people's experience of the lockdown has varied, depending on their employment or education status, family relationships and living situation. Some found it had made little difference to their day-to-day experiences, while others were struggling with increased social isolation and lack of contact with friends and family. Single young parents with small children were finding the lockdown particularly challenging.
- Common challenges faced by young people included high levels of boredom, a loss of routine, and increased anxiety, all of which impact on mental health.
- Some participants identified positive outcomes arising from the lockdown, including the opportunity to learn new skills, be creative and a newfound appreciation for their health, friends and family.
- Young people have found online activities which helped them maintain their mental health and wellbeing, learn new skills (such as cooking) and keep in contact with one another particularly useful during the lockdown.
- Young people requested more sessions on mental health, cooking and exercise, as well as more informal opportunities to socialise as a group online.
- Many of our young people are continuing to receive support from statutory services, but some of our older participants had received little or no support from their social workers or other support officers.
- Young people reported a range of concerns for the remainder of the lockdown and beyond. These included getting into work, continuing to buy essentials, having to use public transport, and overcoming the negative impact on their mental health.



Background

Our children and young people team works with a range of different groups to support them to identify and overcome the barriers they face in entering education, training and employment. These include young people at risk of homelessness, with experience of the care system, who have a history of offending, and who are long-term unemployed.

These vulnerable young people experience a range of common challenges in relation to entering the world of work. Many experience high levels of social isolation, anxiety and mental health support needs, and lack the family support networks that many of their peers take for granted. The young people we support are often living in temporary or unsustainable housing and need support to find appropriate accommodation and develop the skills needed to live independently, such as money management, cooking and basic housing maintenance.

Their adverse childhood experiences mean these young people's education is likely to have been disrupted; consequently, they are less likely than their peers to gain 5 good GCSEs and are far more likely to be NEET. These experiences and lack of positive support networks mean that these young people are at risk of engaging in negative behaviours such as substance misuse or offending, and are vulnerable to exploitation by gangs.

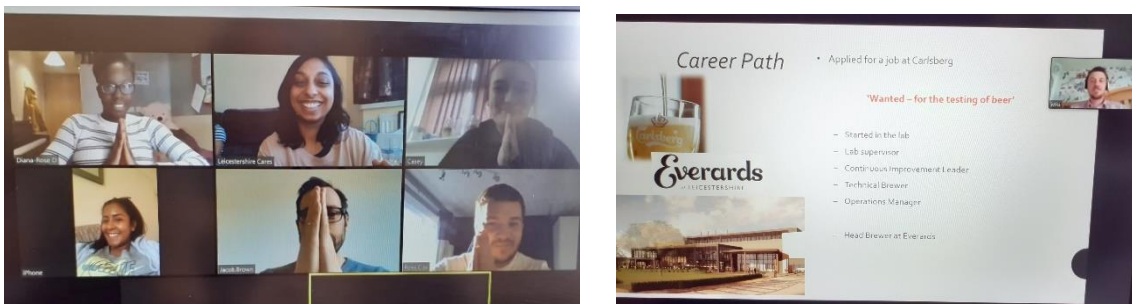
Our rapid assessment of young people's experiences of the Covid19 pandemic aimed to explore how the lockdown and other restrictions implemented by the government are impacting these young people, and what support was needed to support young people in the transition back to "normal" living.



Young people's experience of the lockdown

Our rapid assessment found that young people's experience of the lockdown varied, depending on their employment/education status, family relationships and living situation. Many of our young people are unemployed, and some reported that their day-to-day experiences had changed little as a result of the lockdown. These young people already spent much of their day at home alone, only engaging with others through social media or other virtual platforms (such as online gaming) and the only difference to their daily experiences was the requirement to observe social distancing rules when they left their house. However, it is important to note that this is hardly a positive situation for these young people to be in.

Others reported a far greater impact on their day-to-day experiences. Many of our young people already struggle with social isolation and this had increased significantly since the start of the lockdown. Participants on our Making Moves project who live in a local hostel reported not being allowed to visit others in the same building, having to take it in turns to use the communal garden, and that staff were no longer present in the office. This was proving to be extremely challenging for these young women, the majority of whom have small children who they were struggling to keep fed and occupied. For some living with families, the lockdown had resulted in increased tensions within their households, and we are working closely with other professionals involved with these young people to monitor their situations and address safeguarding concerns.



Common complaints across all of our young people were high levels of boredom and a loss of routine. Participants said that they were struggling to find activities to occupy themselves in lockdown, and that they were starting to lose any sense of routine, often sleeping in until the afternoon and staying up late into the night or early morning. While Leicestershire Cares and other organisations were offering online and virtual activities, participants' limited internet access meant they struggled to access these. Across all our projects there were also reports of increased anxiety, both in relation to becoming ill and, increasingly, engaging with others in social situations. The young people who reported this tended to have anxiety-related disorders which had been exacerbated by the lockdown and social distancing measures.

However, some of our participants also identified some positive aspects of the lockdown. They had found that resources and opportunities to learn new skills had become more readily available online, and had taken the opportunity to fill some of their skills gaps and expand their CVs. Others had taken the time to be creative and had started blogs, been drawing or baking. More than one of our young people said that the lockdown had enabled them to reflect on the important things in life, and they felt they would appreciate their health, family and friends more when the lockdown lifted.

Effective support

As soon as the lockdown was announced, Leicestershire Cares staff quickly moved their support online and adopted remote working practices to continue to provide practical, emotional and employability support to young people, alongside a range of social activities. This has included dropping food and essentials packages to young people, organising online mock interviews, career talks and CV clinics with our business members, delivering online wellbeing, healthy cooking/eating and group exercise sessions to promote positive health and wellbeing, and a range of fun, social activities to keep participants in touch with one another. In one instance, we supported a young person to move out of a hostel and into council accommodation.

Feedback from the young people we support suggests that all of these activities are highly valued by participants. In particular, the food and essentials packages were crucial for young people in the first couple of weeks of the lockdown, when panic buying meant it was difficult for them to find essentials, and high levels of anxiety meant that some found it challenging to leave their homes.

“I have found lockdown useful as it's made me more grateful for the simple things we would overlook and our health.”



In recent weeks, the virtual group activities have been increasingly important for young people to have something positive to engage in and provide some structure to their day. To overcome the challenges of internet access, we issued young people with data sim cards so they could participate in online activities and video call their family and friends, and these have been particularly appreciated. Having time before and after online activities just to speak to one another and have an informal chat was also highly valued by participants.

Those who engage in our projects to find employment have appreciated the ongoing employability activities with business volunteers, while others have gained new skills in cooking and methods to maintain their mental health and wellbeing. Young people requested more sessions on mental health, cooking and exercise, as well as more informal opportunities to socialise.

Many of our young people are continuing to receive support from their key workers and statutory services, such as social workers, probation and housing officers. However, some of our older participants have had little or no support from these services, and have relied mainly or solely on the support provided by Leicestershire Cares.



Concerns for the future

Young people reported a range of concerns for the remainder of the lockdown and as it begins to ease and life returns to normal. For those who engage with us for support to gain employment, their concerns centred on whether they would be able to find work in the near future, given the impact that the pandemic will have on the UK economy.

Participants with children had ongoing concerns about buying food that their children would eat and having access to essentials.

Young people also expressed concerns about coming out of the lockdown. The majority of the participants we work with are reliant on public transport and, due to the challenges of social distancing on buses and trains, many expressed a reluctance to use this to travel. As a result, they felt that even when the lockdown was lifted, they would be unable to travel far from their homes.

The impact of the lockdown on young people's mental health and wellbeing was also a cause for concern. Many reported feeling more anxious and depressed, having less energy, and feeling less and less motivated to engage in activities or think about their futures. Encouraging young people to leave their homes, exercise and engage in safe social interactions will be a significant challenge as the lockdown eases.

Conclusion

Our rapid assessment of vulnerable young people's experiences of the lockdown has found that:

- Young people's experience of the lockdown has varied, depending on their employment or education status, family relationships and living situation. Some found it had made little difference to their day-to-day experiences, while others were struggling with increased social isolation and lack of contact with friends and family. Single young parents with small children were finding the lockdown particularly challenging.
- Common challenges faced by young people included high levels of boredom, a loss of routine, and increased anxiety, all of which impact on mental health.
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- Young people reported a range of concerns for the remainder of the lockdown and beyond. These included getting into work, continuing to buy essentials, having to use public transport, and overcoming the negative impact on their mental health.

At Leicestershire Cares, we will be using the findings of this rapid assessment to inform our planning and support through the remainder of the lockdown and beyond, as the government begins to ease restrictions and we return to a 'new normal'. We urge other organisations working with vulnerable young people to do the same, and ensure that their services adapt and respond to participants' needs throughout this unprecedented time.



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