

Life Under Local Lockdown



Assessing the impact of
the local lockdown on
young people in affected
areas of Leicester and
Leicestershire



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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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“Not being able to see family and friends is a really big issue and makes you feel very isolated, even though they are not really that far away.”

Introduction

On 30 June, Leicester became the first city in the UK to experience local lockdown restrictions following a rise in Covid19 infections. Building on the findings of Leicestershire Cares' assessment of the impact of the national lockdown¹, this report explores how the local lockdown has impacted vulnerable young people in the affected areas of Leicester and Leicestershire.

Impacting all of Leicester city and some parts of the county, the local lockdown has reversed some measures to ease restrictions and have delayed others which were due to come in at the beginning of July. Schools and nurseries have closed once again, and non-essential shops, restaurants, bars and hairdressers have not been able to open in line with the rest of the country. Residents are only able to travel into and out of the lockdown area if this is essential and are restricted to socialising in groups of up to six outdoors, or creating a social bubble with one other household if they live alone.

We consulted with 22 young people from across our projects to explore how the local lockdown was affecting them. In particular, we explored whether it was different to the national lockdown and how. We asked about the challenges they are facing, the support they had found useful and their concerns as the lockdown eases. The below findings 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.

We hope that the findings of this report will be useful to local authorities, youth services and support organisations in Leicester and Leicestershire, as well as other areas which experience local restrictions in the coming months, to enable them to plan and implement effective support at the outset of a local lockdown.

For more information about this report or Leicestershire Cares' work with children and young people, contact:

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¹ Published in May 2020: <https://www.leicestershirecares.co.uk/about-charity/news-events/life-under-lockdown>

Key findings:

- Similarly to the national lockdown, young people's experience of the local lockdown has varied, depending on their living situation. Some have simply found it boring, while others are struggling with increased social isolation, especially as they had plans to see friends and family which could not go ahead.
- Not being able to travel across the lockdown boundary means that many young people are now more isolated than before, as they cannot meet or form social bubbles with relatives or friends who are outside the lockdown area.
- The knowledge that the rest of the country are easing out of lockdown has resulted in intense frustration and even higher feelings of isolation amongst young people, which in turn has affected their mental health.
- Young people reported feeling confused and anxious about the current rules, and also a sense of losing independence and control over their lives.
- Practical challenges faced by young people included buying food and essentials, getting doctors' and hospital appointments, going to the gym and keeping up with the changes in the restrictions.
- Some young people identified positive outcomes arising from the lockdown, including having time to reflect on their futures, learn new skills, communicate with friends and family, and the support from local services.
- Young people have found online activities which helped them stay in touch with friends, have a routine and learn new skills (such as cooking) useful during the lockdown.
- Young people reported three key concerns for the future and coming out of the local lockdown:
 - **Staying safe:** especially when using public transport and going to the shops.
 - **Finding work or starting a course:** young people felt unemployment was likely to be even higher following the local lockdown, and some were reluctant to start work until they were sure it could be safe.
 - **The risk of another local lockdown:** young people were anxious about the prospect of future local lockdowns due to people not following the rules. This concern had risen significantly since our first rapid assessment.

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 five 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 initial 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.

This follow-up assessment aimed to explore the difference in young people's experiences of national and local restrictions, and the support that local services can put in place to mitigate against and alleviate the negative impacts of a local lockdown on vulnerable young people.



Young people's experience of the local lockdown

As we found in our first rapid assessment, young people's experience of the local lockdown has varied, depending on their living situation and employment status. Those who were living with parents or carers reported high levels of boredom but were less likely to say they felt isolated or anxious about the local restrictions. A small number of these participants even expressed a preference for being in lockdown, as they tended to feel anxious in social situations.

In comparison, those who lived away from the family home reported higher levels of social isolation since the local lockdown came into force, as many of their friends and family lived on the other side of the boundary. Consequently, they felt more isolated and lonely than they had previously when they were able to meet outside or form a social bubble with a relative or friend.



You are unable to see other people who are just outside the lockdown area. This seems unfair as you cannot access the support that you need and others that live outside the area cannot come into the area either to support you.



Although their experiences varied, there was a stronger consensus amongst young people in this assessment that the local lockdown was frustrating and creating challenges for them and their families. For many, this resulted from seeing others outside of the lockdown area starting to engage in pre-lockdown activities, such as going shopping, having a haircut and seeing friends and family. This was particularly difficult as young people had plans to see people that they had to cancel when the local lockdown was implemented.

For those who were looking for work or had their own business, the local lockdown was impacting on their ability to progress towards their goals, either because businesses were unable to reopen and therefore recruit, or because they could not open to clients themselves. Some were concerned that they were at a disadvantage compared to other young people outside of the lockdown, who were getting a head start on applying for jobs or getting clients for their business.

The feelings of frustration and isolation reported by young people in turn had had a negative impact on their mental health, which many said had been recovering with the prospect of restrictions being lifted.

Practical challenges

Young people reported a range of practical challenges resulting from the local lockdown. Some young people experienced difficulties in finding food and essentials, as people in their local area had started stockpiling again.

Others had struggled to book doctors' and hospital appointments and felt that telephone consultations were not sufficient for their needs. This was particularly the case for those who were pregnant or had babies or young children, as they struggled to explain their symptoms via phone or video calls.

Some young people missed using leisure facilities or going to the gym, and found that local walks and runs had got repetitive. As a result, their physical and mental health had been affected.

"You feel like you are losing independence and motivation to look after yourself."

A few of the young people said that they found it difficult to keep up with the changes in the rules, and that this had caused confusion and anxiety.

“There was so much to look forward to but then the second lockdown happened. My mental health deteriorated rapidly.”



Positives and support

As before, young people reported some positives resulting from the local lockdown.

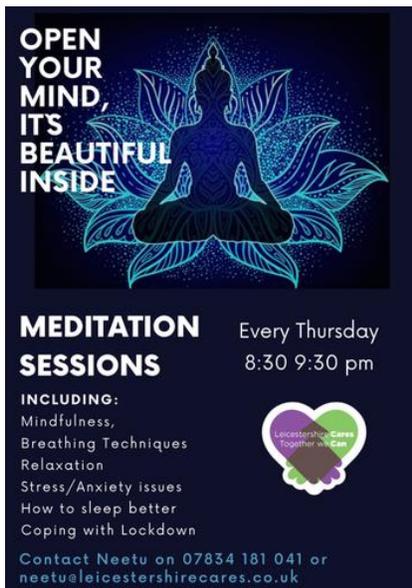
Online interactions with friends was highlighted as a positive, with young people taking part in quizzes and Netflix parties, as well as getting support and advice through social media platforms. Some said they had improved relationships with friends and family as a result.

While some young people said they missed going to the gym, others had been exercising more while at home and had improved their physical health by going out for runs.

A number of young people said they had taken time during lockdown to learn new skills, with one completing a course online. This was echoed by others who felt that the lockdown had given them time to think about their futures.

All the young people highlighted support from local services as a positive arising from the lockdown. The group and individual support from Leicestershire Cares was mentioned by the majority of young people. In particular, they found that the support from their project worker has pushed them to take steps towards their goals, and that the weekly group sessions have given them a routine, something to look forward to, and a way to learn new skills during lockdown.

Other useful sources of support included The Bridge, partners, friends and family.



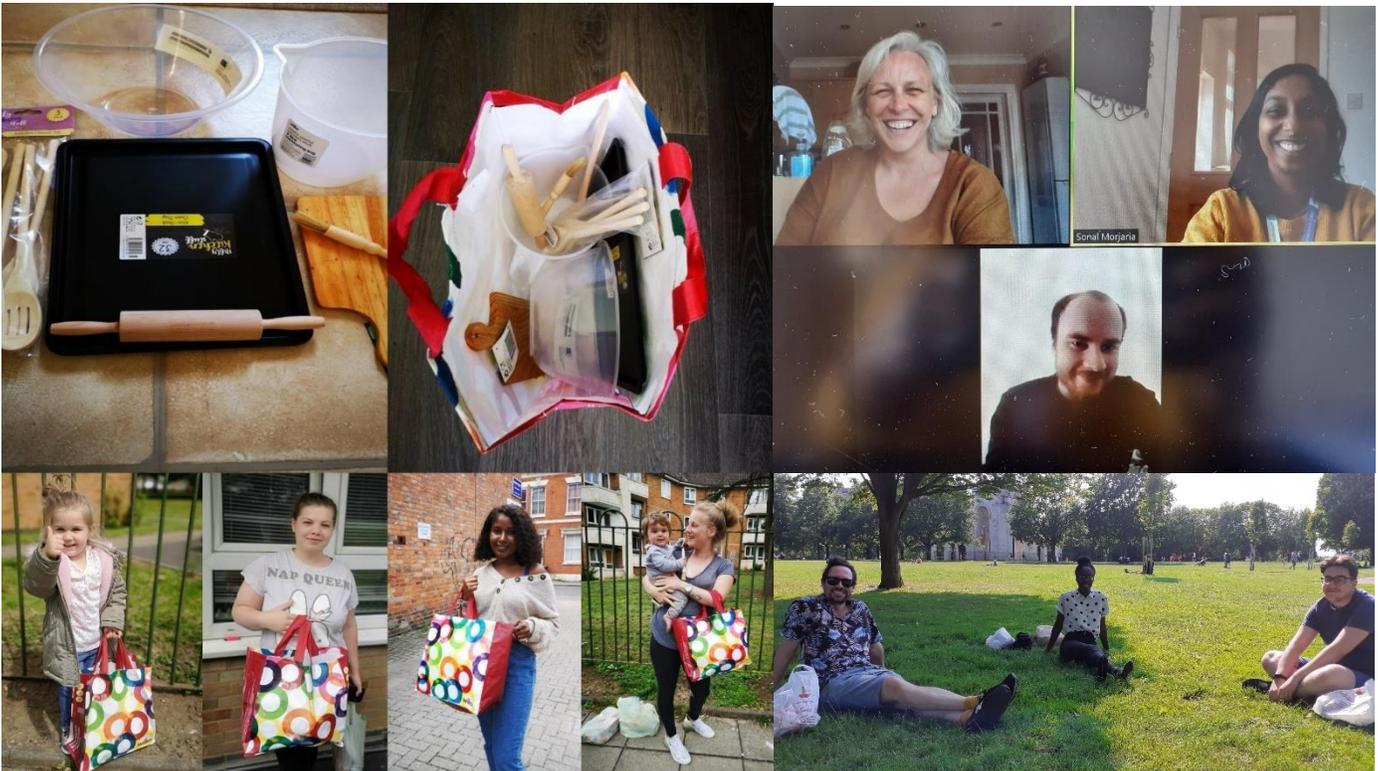
The cooking session [run by Leicestershire Cares] is the only time I get to speak with other adults, have a good time and come off it feeling happy.



Concerns for the future

Young people reported three key concerns about the future and coming out of lockdown:

1. **Staying safe:** young people were particularly concerned about how to stay safe when using public transport and going to the shops. While they were willing to wear masks themselves, they commented that many residents in Leicester did not seem to be following advice on wearing face coverings or social distancing, and this made them anxious about leaving their homes.
2. **Finding work or starting a course:** the majority of young people we spoke to were concerned about how the local lockdown was going to affect their chances of finding work as they felt unemployment was likely to be even higher. Some were also reluctant to start work until they were sure it could be safe.
3. **The risk of another local lockdown:** young people were anxious about the prospect of future local lockdowns due to people not following the current restrictions. They felt that once the current lockdown is lifted, people will ignore all the remaining restrictions which will lead to another spike in infections and subsequently another lockdown. This concern had risen significantly since our first rapid assessment.



Conclusion

Our rapid assessment of vulnerable young people's experiences of the local lockdown in Leicester and parts of Leicestershire has found that:

- Young people's experience of the local lockdown has varied, depending on their living situation. Some have simply found it boring, while others are struggling with increased social isolation, especially as they had plans to see friends and family which could not go ahead.
- Not being able to travel across the lockdown boundary means that many young people are now more isolated than before, as they cannot meet or form social bubbles with relatives or friends outside the lockdown area.
- The knowledge that the rest of the country are easing out of lockdown has resulted in intense frustration and even higher feelings of isolation amongst young people, which in turn has affected their mental health. Young people reported feeling confused and anxious about the current rules, and also a sense of losing independence and control over their lives.
- Practical challenges faced by young people included buying food and essentials, getting doctors' and hospital appointments, going to the gym and keeping up with the changes in the restrictions.
- Some young people identified positive outcomes arising from the lockdown, including having time to reflect on their futures, learn new skills, communicate with friends and family, and the support from local services.
- Young people have found online activities which helped them stay in touch with friends, have a routine and learn new skills (such as cooking) useful during the lockdown.
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Recommendations

1. Young people need urgent interventions to improve their mental health and wellbeing and reduce their social isolation

The ban on non-essential travel across the boundary of the lockdown area has meant that young people feel more isolated than before. Feelings of isolation and poor mental health have been made more acute by the knowledge that people in the rest of the country are easing out of the national lockdown and are starting to engage in more social and leisure activities. Young people urgently need support from youth and community services and organisations to help them engage in positive activities which improve their mental health and enable them to socialise safely with others.

2. Young people need clearer guidance on the current restrictions

Young people's confusion and anxiety about the current rules are concerning. Without clearer messaging reaching all communities across the affected area, there is a real risk that young people and other residents do not follow the restrictions, which will result in an extension of the local lockdown and further challenges arising. The City Council needs to do more to ensure that all young people are aware of and able to follow safety guidance. It is also important that any changes are communicated quickly and effectively across the affected areas.

3. Other areas need to prepare for the impact of a local lockdown on vulnerable young people

Leicester will not be the only city that experiences a local lockdown. Other areas of the country have already been identified as having high rates of infections, and are at risk of being subject to localised restrictions. The negative impact of a local lockdown may be even more significant following a period when residents have been able to shop, socialise and travel more freely. The findings of this report should be used by local authorities, youth services and support organisations in other areas which experience local restrictions in the coming months, to enable them to plan and implement effective support at the outset of a local lockdown.

At Leicestershire Cares, we will be using the findings of both of our rapid assessments to inform our planning and support through the remainder of the local lockdown and beyond, as the government further eases 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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