Youth voices project in Essex
‘Youth in Lockdown’ April-June 2020

This youth voices project was funded through the #Iwillfund and Essex Community Foundation and was run specifically to hear from young people in Essex over the Covid-19 pandemic to learn how they were feeling at this point in the pandemic, and what we could do to help them cope.

The project was aimed at young people from voluntary youth settings who were currently engaging with their groups via Zoom or other social media platforms. It was run by their own youth leaders, who could run the session plan with any of the various games/activities included to encourage discussion, fun and engagement around the topic. The session plan could be shaped to fit the young people in the group, the space that the group had access to, the amount of time they had to run the session and the type of group it was (i.e open youth club, Faith based, Uniformed, SEN etc). This flexibility meant that we could be as inclusive as possible and hear from lots of different groups across Essex (including Southend & Thurrock).

Questions that formed the basis of our youth session & research findings

1.) What do you think adults could do to help improve young people’s mental-health during lockdown?

2.) How are young people being affected most during lockdown?

3.) What is helping you to cope during lockdown?

4.) Are you worried that your education/ future might be affected because of lockdown?

5.) In which ways do you think your education/ future might be affected?

6.) What is the worst thing about being in lockdown?

7.) What is the best thing about being in lockdown?

8.) What methods of communication are you using to stay in touch with friends, school work, family etc?

9.) Is there anything positive that you feel people could learn from this experience?
What were the ages of young people who took part?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 yrs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 yrs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 yrs</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>12 yrs</td>
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<td>14 yrs</td>
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<td>15 yrs</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 yrs</td>
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<td>17 yrs</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>18 yrs</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 yrs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-25 yrs</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 202 young people

1.) How are you generally feeling during lockdown?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Really Good</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A bit low</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really low</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.) What do you think adults could do to help improve young people’s mental health during lockdown?

Top answers
1.) Provide fun activities for us to do (Zoom, distractions from gaming and t.v, social media activites, youtube channels)
2.) Be more supportive if we are feeling down and help us have positive mental health
3.) Have proper conversation with us instead of just asking how we are all the time, because we don’t know how we feel!
5.) Understand how stressful it is to try to keep up with school work during a Global pandemic
6.) Teachers could do more to check we understand the work being set and be more lenient with deadlines
7.) Spend more time doing family activities or chilling out together (i.e walks, board games, making memories)
8.) Give us some more time and space alone (especially if we have younger siblings)
9.) Teachers give lots of work, but we need more support from parents
10.) Let us sleep & don’t make us feel guilty for doing nothing
11.) Give more definite answers to enquiries about the lockdown & Covid-19
12.) Let us exercise more so we don’t feel trapped at home
13.) Hug us
Key Comments from young people

‘Being in Lockdown has helped me to think about my priorities. I have worked so hard for my exams that didn’t happen and now realised that I need to spend more time on myself’

‘I have got no social life and I am dependent on technology for entertainment. I am overwhelmed with online stuff to do but want to be outside’

‘Provide us with face-to-face teaching rather than just giving us lots of work which we have to do on our own’

‘instead of asking us how we are feeling all the time, just make general conversation or ask what we’ve been doing, watching or listening to – because we don’t know how we’re feeling half the time!’

‘leave us alone when we want to be alone but make sure we get plenty of rest and don’t stay up all night’

2.) How are young people being affected most during lockdown?
Top answers
1.) I Miss seeing and being with my friends
2.) I am bored! There is nothing to do and I miss my hobbies (football, swimming, gymnastics, Youth club)
3.) I miss my wider family
4.) I feel socially isolated. I miss my freedom and feel trapped inside
5.) I miss my school education and having proper teaching
6.) I am not motivated to work from home/ I feel stressed by working from home
7.) There is a lack of routine and no end to school!
8.) I am worried about my future because of no school/ college
9.) I don’t think I am being affected
10.) My mental health has declined
11.) My sleep pattern has changed
12.) I am sad because of cancelled events and holidays

Key Comments from young people

‘It’s so hard not being able to see the people who mean the most to you’

‘I feel like this is going on and on now. I just wish I could see the future to know that things will be alright’

‘I miss my girlfriend and my grandparents so much it hurts’

3.) What is helping you to cope during lockdown?
Top answers
1.) Family time (card games, walks, games)
2.) Using technology to have time with friends/wider family (Quizzes, parties, dressing up, virtual film club & sleep overs)
4.) Exercise (biking, dancing, walks, skateboarding, basketball)
5.) Hobbies & learning new ones (drawing, reading, writing, guitar, baking)
6.) Doing activities on zoom with my youth organisation (games, magazine writing, singing, art work, music, art work, council)
7.) Gaming
8.) Trying to keep busy and have a routine
9.) Looking after my pets
10.) My friends
11.) Music
12.) Chocolate/ junk food
13.) School/ College work
14.) T.V
15.) Napping

‘Family time’ was over twice as popular as the second highest answer
4.) Are you worried that your education/ future might be effected because of lockdown?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>152</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over three times as many young people said that they did feel their education/ future would be effected because of lockdown!

5.) In which ways do you think your education/ future might be effected?

**Top answers**

1.) I am falling behind because of having to do school/college work from home *(lack of resources, motivation, bad internet having to teach yourself with lack of teacher support)*
2.) It won’t affect me as I can work at home
3.) I am worried because I can’t take exams and my predicted grades could have been better
4.) The transition to College/ University is going to be really hard
5.) Because of the lack of exam experience when take my A-levels
6.) I might lose my job and I need the money

Over twice times as many young people said that they were worried about failing behind with their school work than the second most popular answer

**Key Comments from young people**

‘I feel like jobs might be more flexible in the future with home working. This will really help with my anxiety if I can work from home sometimes when I’m feeling low’

‘Getting set work from school is not as good as things you don’t understand can’t be explained to you’

‘My GCSE results will not be reflective of what I actually could’ve got. Plus, I don’t want to be in a position where my results are considered less valuable because I didn’t earn them the proper way’

‘It can be hard having a Mum as a teacher because it’s not the sort of relationship you want to have with your Mum’

‘At school we can ask a question and get an answer straight away. Sometimes teachers take days to answer an email’

6.) What is the worst thing about being in lockdown?

**Top answers**

1.) Not seeing my friends
2.) Not seeing wider family
3.) Boredom and not being able do the things I enjoy *(hobbies, sports, being outside, youth club, shopping, eating out)*
4.) Feeling isolated and trapped at home
5.) Not knowing what the future will hold & cancelled events
6.) The stress and pressure from online school work
7.) Lack of routine
8.) Less hugs from friends
9.) living with family 100% of the time as you can’t escape from your siblings

6.) What is the best thing about being in lockdown?

**Top answers**

1.) More family time
2.) Having time for hobbies/ learning a new one *(gardening, languages, sign language, cooking, art, instruments, reading)*
3.) Doing school work at my own pace without the pressure
4.) Being able to relax, sleep in and have more free time
5.) Doing more exercise *(working out, basketball, walks, swimming at home)*
6.) Being in touch with my friends more online
7.) No bullying like at school
8.) No school work or exams
9.) Not having a strict routine
10.) Spending time with my pets

**Key Comments from young people**

‘I really enjoy doing school work in my pyjamas!’

‘Doing school work from home is good because it means I only need to communicate with people that I actually like!’

‘It’s great to have extra family time- even if its forced’
8. **What methods of communication are you using to stay in touch with friends, school work and family?**

The colour of the word in the image shows the ways that young people have been connecting with:

- **Friends** = Red
- **Family** = Green
- **School** = Blue
- **Youth Organisation** = Purple

(The bigger the word, the more)

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7. **Is there anything positive that you feel people could learn from this experience?**

**Top answers**

1. Taking care of the planet is important. Look how much the environment has changed
2. Learnt how important family and friends are to me and will value time with them
3. To never take life or freedom for granted
4. The sense of community and helping vulnerable people is great (like during the War times)
5. Don’t take school education for granted
6. I have learnt new skills (instruments, baking, gardening)
7. To enjoy being outside and doing exercise
8. How to be by myself without friends
9. Value the NHS
10. Learnt to be more independent and manage school work
11. Washing hands more and self-hygiene
12. To try to have a positive mental attitude

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**Key comments from youth leaders:**

‘It is clear the young people have a lot of questions and just want some answers, especially around school. They want to be told that this won’t have a knock on effect for their future plans’

‘Young people’s voices haven’t really been heard in lockdown and so a survey like this is really beneficial’

‘One young man who wanted to take part has a life threatening illness so we met physically at a socially distant meeting with his parents in the front garden!’

‘Even the young people that are still doing school are finding they are less stressed than they would be normally going to school’

‘Even though they have been trapped in their houses some of the young people mentioned that their family bond has actually increased and that they know who their friends are better due to different circumstances of communicating’

‘The young people are really struggling with their school work and appear to be worried for their future’

‘We found that the quite a lot of our younger group were more positive about the situation then we were expecting them to be and most of this is due to less pressure being on them’

‘The young people who are normally quite isolated have got involved in the group more due to it being on zoom. It has helped with their anxiety and they have asked if we can continue doing some session on zoom after the lockdown’
Summary

Online education seems to be a bit hit and miss as some young people are enjoying managing their time and schooling but most are struggling with the workload and the inability to get an instant answer if they don’t understand the work set. Young people are mostly coping with this, but desperate for normality and some face to face time with their teachers as the current support is not enough to help them learn the work they are being set. There were a few comments from young people that they enjoy doing school work from home because it has meant they do not experience any bullying.

An overwhelming majority of young people are worried that the lockdown will have an effect on their education and their future. Those in year 11 and 13 are worried about grades, transition to college/uni and that they may be looked down upon as they didn’t get their results ‘the proper way’. Those in College are desperately worried about their colleges courses as work placements may have stopped and practical courses may not be able to start up again soon.

Young people are experiencing a sense of community that they haven’t experienced before and have really appreciated having extra time to learn new skills and spend time with family. Young people are missing their friends the most, but it is family that is helping them through lockdown and they are grateful for that support. Although some young people mentioned that they would appreciate time away from siblings and more help from parents with school work.

Online technology has been a massive plus in helping young people stay in contact with friends and wider family, but has also made them realise how much they take family, friends and the freedoms that we have for granted.

The Young people have enjoyed the positive impact on the environment that lockdown has bought and it has given them a renewed sense of environmental awareness and passion to look after the planet. Young people miss taking part in activities that are not currently available such as sports and youth clubs but have enjoyed taking exercise each day.

It is clear that Lockdown has thrown young people a massive curve ball, they miss their freedom and hate being stuck inside. Thankfully the majority seem to be coping ‘ok’, but I would worry about the young people who don’t have access to youth groups for support or a trusted adult to listen to their views.

We often characterise young people as those most comfortable with living virtually and engaging with friends on social media, but these findings show that young people hugely value the physical presence of others and the hugs from family and friends. Young people need people - and they need people with them physically not just virtually. Lockdown is helping us all to stay safe physically and protect our NHS, and as lockdown continues we may see a rise in young people’s anxiety levels and poor mental health because of the issues highlighted in this report.

A BIG thank you to all 202 young people in 17 youth clubs who took part, to their leaders for taking the time to run the session online, and to the #iwillfund & Essex Community Foundation for allowing this project to take place. I am certain that this information will be a valuable insight into the lives of young people during lockdown and that adults who read this will have a greater understanding of what they are going through and how they may be able to help them at this time.

Thank you, stay safe  
- Rachel Brett  
(ECVYS CEO)