



Current concerns/issues being raised by Include Youth staff and young people about the impact of Covid 19

Updated report October/November 2020

Mental Health

- Young people's anxiety is heightened about leaving the house, having to wear a mask and using public transport. Not using public transport is not a choice for many young people as they use it to attend work.
- Young people who have had CAMHS appointments have had them cancelled or postponed and are now being offered meetings via the phone which does not suit all young people. Some young people prefer face to face meetings and are not comfortable with phone meetings.
- Young people suffering panic attacks at the mention of having to wear a mask – due to previous trauma.
- Major worries about mental health impacts of the pandemic and fear about the isolation of another lockdown.
- Staff are extremely worried about young people's mental and emotional health.
- General anxiety and mental health of young people and staff including a long period of time working online- young people becoming self-conscious, fed up, fatigued.

- Young people who are accessing primary mental health services/ counselling cannot access this at present and are being offered a reduced service over the phone, putting young people at risk of suicide or self-harm.
- Some young people are anxious around physically 'starting programme' with their worker if the contact is only over Zoom.
- Very hard for young people to get doctors' appointments and people cannot get the flu jab.
- Covid has affected everyone's mental health. Young people have realised that humans are selfish and don't care about others.
- Things haven't been addressed properly- more deaths due to suicide than there has been due to coronavirus. Mental health has taken a back seat.

- Government has spent so much money on the disease, and nothing extra has been put into mental health.
- *“Self-isolating really affects mental health- no support, especially for young people in care. Lockdown will come again, and young people are screwed. If data runs out- we have no contact with outside world or friends”.*
- *“All of this has affected my mental health way too much. I am very frustrated, it has been very hard”.*
- Young people are still worried about their mental health and they are anxious about prospect of more lockdowns and restrictions, especially if they are unable to visit family or peers. These groups would normally be their support networks.
- There were also points made about the stress on young people’s families with insecure or loss of employment and the impact this has on their family situation.
- ***“We have more chance of surviving COVID than suicide and loneliness”.***

Financial/ Poverty/Food Poverty

- Young people not having enough electric in the home, embarrassed to ask for help. Food is then spoiled due to non-refrigeration.
- Digital poverty – young people do not have access to internet as they cannot afford to pay bills.
- Increased use of support food banks and local churches for food.
- Young people did benefit with help for electric/fuel/phone top ups over lockdown and this was a great help. They felt having this was good as the Social Workers s cannot always do this. They also benefited from take away food, meal recipes, baking recipes etc. provided by IY.
- Other young people said that they did not benefit from the help being offered during the first lockdown in terms of emergency groceries, as they felt ‘too proud/awkward’ to ask for help. But they have given feedback that if this was to happen again they would be thankful for help with food and would appreciate any help IY can offer. They also said if staff were able to just bring food once a week it would really help.
- *“Was really good to get food parcels from Give and Take they really helped”.*
- Risks of young people losing part time employment with no pay, as many may be on temporary or ‘zero hour’ contracts and most retail/hospitality industry has been closed.
- Budgeting is difficult. Young people don’t have enough money which affects general health and mental health.
- Young people feel that the government has focused on getting a cure for coronavirus and don’t care about anything else.
- Nothing has been done to address poverty for young people. No money for things like internet or phone top ups.
- Things have got worse, lack of jobs and lack of opportunity for young people.

- Young people get paid less for doing the same jobs, no incentive to work, not worthwhile to work. Better off being on the dole.

Education

- Young people needing to gain qualifications to meet a deadline for accessing job or college courses but are unable to do so due to lack of classes or limited online access.
- For young people who are exempt from wearing a mask, they are unable to engage with classes due to mandatory mask enforcements – young people feel left behind and are missing out on learning. They are unable to learn through google classroom due to learning needs.
- Google classroom does not meet the learning needs of someone who needs face to face support.
- Concerns about gaining qualifications in time for being able to start tech in September, especially for young people who are struggling with the loss of routine or online medium and who need extra support.
- Young people not being able to use online resources because the log in/ access process seems too complicated. Not everyone's learning style suited to online style of learning.
- Ongoing issues of lack of access to tech and young people being uncomfortable with online engagement.
- Tuition fees should be waived. What's happening to the spare money?
- Concerned that the schools are still opened and spreading the virus. Schools opened but pubs closed!
- What's the difference in a 15year old hanging out with mates and 19year old hanging out with mates?
- Bubbles are being sent home and not the whole school, so they won't test everyone in the class, only those in the bubble.
- School kids are not social distancing and NOT wearing masks.
- Worried that the schools are still open.
- *"All learning stopped for a few weeks which was really hard. At the beginning it was really hard to understand google classrooms but was good to be able to learn over zoom and whats app calls"*.
- Worried that Give and Take could close again as some young people don't like or struggle with the online stuff.
- Some young people will be moving on in Dec/January and worry that they will not get enough time with tutors before then. Also worried about upcoming exams.
- First time round young people were able to continue their learning over zoom, google classrooms and work packs but they do feel face to face learning is better for them.

- Concern from a staff member about the volume of young people who haven't returned to school and the poor school attendance among those at risk of leaving school early.

Isolation/Loneliness

- Young people feeling like they no longer connect with friends and family due to digital poverty and they are unable to have face to face meetings.
- Young people worried if there are more restrictions brought in and not seeing family, youth workers, peers. Some young people who live on their own or supported accommodation rely on going to Give and Take and other services, rely on 121 meet ups etc.
- Young people still feel very isolated and torn between wanting to use social media to stay in touch but then being bombarded by negative/ distressing messages on social media which increases anxiety.
- Repeated concern from staff about how young people usually access Give and Take programme three days a week giving them structure and routine for their week including a free lunch, WIFI, safe place to be, physical activity, social trips, friendships – risk of loneliness, neglect, HUGE impact on their physical, social and mental well-being.
- Fear for another lockdown and being isolated again.
- Not being able to see family or friends
- Barely anyone was sticking to the rules- friends were living together over first lockdown.
- Some stated they found themselves feeling more isolated and anxiety heightened from this which made them feel afraid to go to the shops for essentials etc.

Safety

- Concerns on what is and is not safe due to mixed messages on the media and from government around Covid.

Family Tensions/Support

- Family breakdowns due to having no respite from parents. Young people are used to coming to START 3-4 times a week and this has now had to stop due to restrictions.
- Young people have had to move from their family home to stay with relatives due to ongoing fighting with parents and siblings.
- Young LGBTQ person not supported in family home – spending time with relatives; this is breaking down relationships within family unit and causing more distress.
- Relationship breakdowns for those living with family.
- *“Sometimes I have had fights with my family because I take my anger out on them when they say I can't go into the house because of COVID”.*

- A young person said he was worried about more restrictions as this would mean he would have to stay full time, all day everyday in his foster placement and this became quite strained last time around. His foster parents are elderly and live in a very rural setting and did not let him leave. He has now got a good routine of engaging with Give and Take twice a week and this is then combining with meeting his other siblings and his mother. He feels this is working at the moment but is worried re the next number of weeks.
- People are at each other's throats. If living together and don't get on it's very difficult
- No supports have been put in place

Social Work Support

- Some social workers off and some have been really good and very supportive.
- Some young people worry if Social Work involvement will decrease and there will be less support, however in the Southern Trust for a long time they have been working on a rota basis and only seeing young people face to face if completely NECESSARY, so young people are used to this now.
- Social workers are not available to support young people; they are either working from home, off sick or the case is deemed as low priority.
- Young person needing assigned an adolescent social worker and being told they are not a priority and are placed on a 'waiting list'.
- Mixed messages from social workers as it is a new social worker each time we try to contact, no consistency.
- Multiagency meeting cancelled due to Covid and no attempt to complete this via zoom.
- For us in the Northern Trust, young people agree that there has been a scaling back of social worker intervention, having to go back to unstable family homes and removed from supported accommodation or foster due to Covid has had a huge impact on their mental health. Also, incidents going on in the home and then not being able to get a hold of their Social Worker for help has been a big issue.

Drugs/ Alcohol

- One young person said she is worried re: her issues with drugs, she states that during last lockdown she went on harder drugs due to her usual drug (which she manages ok on) not being available. She doesn't want to go back to those other drugs again. She says lots of her peers were taking drugs and alcohol due to boredom and usual outlets not being available just as school/tech/leisure facilities.

- Increased use of alcohol to combat boredom during the day.

Children's Homes

- One young person said there was increased tension in the home.

Criminalisation risks

- Young people becoming aggressive and abusive with younger siblings in the family home due to not having their own space to spend time on their own.
- Overcrowded family home means not allowed to social bubble with another household; leading to complaints from neighbours when these rules are being broken. At risk of further arrests as warnings have been given.
- Risk of our young people NOT adhering to social distancing and choosing to spend time with people outside of their house.... putting themselves at risk and in trouble with Police teams.
- Greater risk of being involved in paramilitary activities for money/ financial gain.

Rural Issues

- One young person says he would be isolated and if he cannot access transport then this would remain a worry and an issue for him.

Missing out on key events

- Young people missed out on their birthdays and family birthdays over lock down and they think this will happen again due to restrictions, but they accepted this as it was.

Feeling Stigmatised

- Young people feel stigmatised as the main perpetrators for breaking social distancing rules. Government need to be more appreciative of what young people are going through and how they are contributing to keeping everyone safe by staying in.
- They also mentioned being victimised as a result of society's view on 'young people' and holding them accountable for the increase in cases, and having to deal with that on top of the pandemic itself.
- The media constantly stating young people are the main perpetrators; young people who have not been out over the door since lockdown began feeling angry that they are being stigmatised.
- Young people exempt from wearing a mask are treated as though they are trying to antagonise or rebel when in shops, and challenged by sales persons.

Information

- Young people unable to articulate why they are exempt from wearing a mask without exposing their trauma and/or illness.
- Conflicting information from media, government, social workers, education support – young people don't know the new guidelines and how this affects them.
- There is no child friendly guidance published to inform young people.
- Young people do not have a clear understanding of the ever changing guidelines.

Supported accommodation

- *"I stayed in my mums for a while and when I returned, they made me self-isolate for two weeks even though I had no symptoms, it drove me crazy".*

Young Carers

- *"It has been really hard, before COVID I would have helped my mum a lot with my sister who has Cerebral Palsy but now I am not allowed into the house. This has been really hard for me".*
- Unable to attend zoom or face to face sessions due to caring commitments or distractions in background.
- One point made by staff member in partner organisation was that some young people have found themselves in caring positions to family members. She spoke about a young person whose Mum has long Covid and has had to give up work due to it. This young woman has spoken about not going out to meet friends at the weekend as she feels that she needs to be in the house for her Mum.

Status

- *"Everything has stopped - my date for Home Office has been cancelled twice, making me feel so bad and low, it is very unfair. I have lived in Belfast for one year now but because of COVID my life has been put on hold, I would love to work but I am not allowed. It has affected everything I cannot do anything".*
- *"Very very hard for me, I have had four Home Office appointments cancelled. It has had a very bad impact on my mental health".*

Missing key events

- *"My court date has been cancelled and I have had to wait over three months for a new one and because of this I still have my curfew, it's really unfair."*
- Exams were cancelled due to self-isolating.
- Mile stone birthdays missed and unable to celebrate due to Covid.

Uncertain Future

- For me the main issue is young people knowing what's next with their lives- no direction, no qualifications and jobs becoming scarce.

Difference youth work support/IY programme has made

- There was also a point made by one staff member about how much the young people appreciated the support of youth workers more than before and valued their attempts to stay in touch or meet up socially distanced and outdoors when there were no other options.
- *“When lockdown hit, I was stuck in the house with little to do. Strive really helped me stay motivated by arranging different activities that were really fun. I took part in the quarantine quiz with Youth Initiatives in Derry, bingo and the juggling, which I would never have done before going to Strive. I wasn’t confident on Zoom at first but the team helped me with my confidence around this. As it became clear that I was going to be in the house for a while, I started to take on projects around my house and garden. When the Strive team seen what I had done, they were so impressed that they put them on Facebook for everyone to see. I submitted these different projects I did during Covid to inspire other people. I did the wheelbarrow of flowers with my grandfather and planted a vegetable patch. I helped my dad build a bench, which we used loads over the summer.”*
- *Strive has made a huge difference in my life, especially during lockdown. I feel more positive about staying in contact now, even if there is another lockdown. It has given me the motivation to try new things in the future.*
- *I’m more willing to call on zoom now, which I would never have had the confidence to do before. I’ll help out with projects that my dad and granddad are doing now, where I wouldn’t have had the motivation to do so before. Strive has helped me become more confident when meeting people for the first time.*
- *I have been so grateful for the support from Give and Take. Just being able to have someone to talk to and have a laugh on my doorstep.*
- *In a time of need Include Youth have supported me with electric, oil heating and shopping vouchers.*
- *The laptop has made a big difference for me, it’s so easy to set up and I can use google classroom and the internet to talk with my tutor.*
- *Getting the laptop has been a great help to me, I can do my essential skills and OCN courses more easily because of google classroom, I can e mail my tutors and do research.*
- *Give and Take has been very helpful for young people throughout lockdown, doing online classes for young people and staying in contact with us to see if we are coping alright which I appreciated a lot.*