



Documenting life in lockdown



May 2021

Introduction

East Grinstead Museum and Healthwatch West Sussex have worked together to **Document Life in Lockdown**, in and around East Grinstead Town and surrounding area.

East Grinstead Museum is collecting photographs and short films of daily life, both at home and in the town, along with creative works or a short diary that have been inspired by the pandemic lockdown.



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Our aim is to capture diverse experiences - sad or joyful - and to reflect East Grinstead's diversity.

Jonathan Parrett, East Grinstead Museum Manager

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Healthwatch West Sussex is keen to understand how lockdown has affected people's health and wellbeing.

East Grinstead Museum will be using these contributions to create an exhibition that reflects how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted life in East Grinstead and surrounding villages.

To begin this process, two questionnaires were active during March and April 2021 on both websites. One for businesses and the other for individuals. These surveys were promoted to local businesses and voluntary and community groups in the East Grinstead area.

These questionnaires were completed by 12 people (2 businesses and 10 individual responses).

What did residents say about their lockdown experience?

How has lockdown life been for you?

Largely people shared that they had been very resilient and **just got on with things** and have been **very busy**. Some said they **have been pretty good! my neighbourhood has a lovely park and lake for walks**.



Some reported finding the lockdown **boring, frustrating, but had created some new opportunities**. Some found lockdown **stressful** especially the various pieces of information from the Government.

One respondent informed that as the lockdown **started there was the shock of all my work suddenly ending, as I work with vulnerable people, in care homes and with individuals with lung conditions, etc.**



The first lockdown was not too challenging, despite the fact I lost my job during it. The good weather enabled me to exercise regularly especially in the surrounding countryside and being active around the house and in the garden, there was plenty of interaction (socially distanced) with neighbours.

However, the third lockdown since Christmas has been much harder. The weather has meant outdoor exercise is occasional, and I have really missed being able to see people in the street. Video calls are OK, but they are not a real substitute for actually meeting someone, even socially distanced. The short dark days have also been trying, and I have found my health suffering. Primarily disrupted sleep, but also a tendency to more negative thoughts, and I have put weight on as a consequence of comfort eating and drinking.



People's reflections to this question reflected the diversity of circumstances.

- *I recognise that socio-economically I am in a privileged position, in that I have a safe home, a laptop and my own room. Yet, as it has been for everyone, mentally it has been a struggle. Schoolwork has been my biggest concern, being in exam year. The lack of information has been extremely frustrating and draining.*



- *I have been shielding since March last year, as I have severe COPD. I live with my husband, who works at Hever castle, and was furloughed during the first lockdown. We actually really enjoyed this time together, as the weather was so lovely, and I think we thought that it would all be over in a few months!*

Despite this, I was always quite anxious about contracting the virus, as I felt that I would be very ill, and that I might not get good care in hospital - this was at a time when it seemed that older people were almost being blamed for the problems as they caught the virus so easily. I run a group for people with COPD, and everyone felt the same.

Since the advent of the vaccine - and getting the jab! I have felt very relieved.

When did you first learn about COVID-19?

Most people learnt about COVID-19 **very early on in January/February** and a couple even earlier due to the **media updates and working in the NHS**.

Was there a moment when you realised an historic event was taking place?

For some people they realised this would be a historic event when they received a **letter from the Government** and **heard more in the newspapers**. Hearing and understanding the **'R' number and global pandemic**.

For some people they began to **'shield'**, before being advised to, so stopped coming in to work.

Those working in the NHS began to see the increases in COVID-19 cases.

For those in education **physically attending school stopped and online school began**.

- Yes. I kept all the papers and the letter from the government.
- When staff stopped coming into work, colleagues were shielding and some days it seemed like there were only a few of us at the **"sharp end"**.
- Around April, when I understood the significance of the **'R' number**, and the impact on hospitals of the infection.
- Just a gradual realisation through 2020 when we didn't fully come out of the first lockdown.



- I would not call a global pandemic historic.
- Looking back in my diary, it was around the 12th March, which was the last time I went out until after the first lockdown. All my group members felt the same, and *we were basically shielding before we were told to do so*. The realisation was confirmed when the lockdown was announced.
- When we got sent home from school in March, I realised this isn't normal at all. It kind of hit after the Easter holidays when I realised, we were in this for the long haul and weren't going back to school or life as we knew it anytime soon.
- I don't remember!

What were your initial thoughts about COVID-19? How have your thoughts about COVID-19 evolved over time?

(Nine people answered this question.)

Initially some **did not think COVID-19 was real** or believed it was **something less urgent**, as they connected it to something known. Concern increased with the use of PPE, face coverings etc.

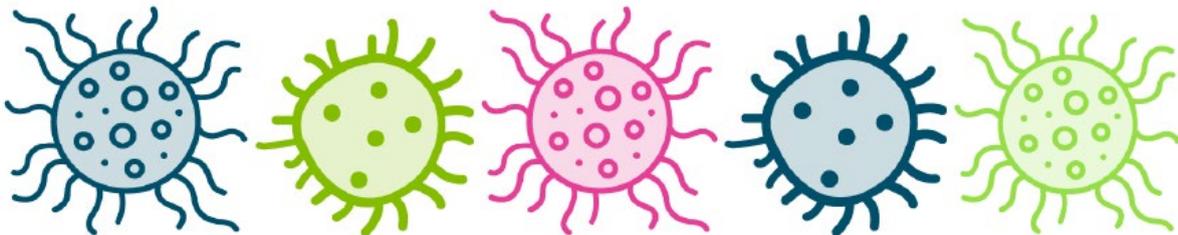
Some people have become more **anxious and frustrated** as the pandemic has progressed and **some have accepted that COVID-19 may well be around for some time** to come.

Mourning the loss of lives. Feel sad to have lost the little things that occurred pre-COVID-19 - seeing our family members, **'hugging grandma'**, going out for a meal.

- At first, *didn't think it was real*, then when I got it. I knew this was serious. We got it mildly, so was lucky.
- I wear PPE when I test patients for COVID-19 - I feel secure in the knowledge I have been *trained to cope!!!*
- Initially, assumed it would blow over, like Bird 'flu'.
- Becoming more and more frustrated (rather than anxious): keen to see an end.
- *A shocking disease*, and my thoughts haven't changed.
- A man-made disease from China. It's a global disaster.
- Initially, I was worried about societies ability to prevent infection and therefore control the spread of the virus. I could not see an obvious route to doing so,

when a person could be infectious for several days before they had any symptoms. As such, I started to prepare for a pandemic at the start of February, ordering face masks for both myself and my parents.

- My thoughts have not changed significantly. I still believe that prevention is preferable to catching the disease.
- I was initially very worried about the spread and danger of the virus and haven't really changed my mind much! The only change is that I did think it would go away initially, and it's now clear that it will be around for a long time, and we will just have to learn to live with it.
- Generally, it's *heart-breaking* how many lives have been lost. That is the worst thing, to know that everyone knows someone who's been affected by COVID-19 and how it's torn apart families and the little things we used to take for granted.



What decisions have you had to make (if any) to protect yourself and your health?

Following the guidance, shielding, taking the situation seriously, to help protect their own and others health were commonly shared.

- To stay at home, not to see anyone. Just try and keep my little family safe.
- Wear my PPE!
- Wash my hands.
- Isolation; cut off from friends and family.
- Only to try and follow the rules, even when they've been confusing.
- Not meeting/hugging friends or family.





- I have asthma and have therefore minimised any time spent in an indoor setting other than my own home. *I have not eaten out, had a haircut, or gone in a pub in 12 months now.*
- To *follow lockdown rules* and do everything within my power to stay safe. My family personally, still don't go to shops, we have our groceries delivered to our home and sanitise everything first.

How worried were you about getting COVID-19 in March/April 2020 and now?

Many were worried **about catching COVID-19 or not knowing if a patient had COVID-19 or not during March/April 2020**. One or two people remain concerned about catching the virus. Those who have experienced the virus continue to be concerned by the side effects such as fatigue and the longer-term impact.

However, some reported not being so worried now they have **received their first vaccination**.

- I've been *up and down with worry*, I'm not as worried now I've had it (vaccination) and I can see the news is telling us it's more under control.
- On an orange route at the hospital - *not knowing if a patient had COVID-19*.
- In March, not very worried; still not overly worried: a bit anxious for friends and family.
- Not particularly worried then or now (less so now I've had the first vaccination).
- *Terrified. Much the same.*
- I was moderately concerned in early March and had started wearing face masks in supermarkets before the national lockdown.
- I remain moderately concerned and minimise my risk as much as possible.
- I was very worried and continue to be so, until very recently, when I had the first vaccine. The falling case numbers are comforting but am very aware this could change very quickly. I am concerned that people will increasingly ignore the rules as the lifting of lockdown proceeds.
- I've only gotten more worried over time, seeing the real impact it's had. Also, now *the fatigue is sinking in, the novelty of so much free time and being at home has completely worn off*, so it's tempting to just ignore the rules and hug friends and family again.

Did you have trouble tracking down any important household items during the pandemic?

Most respondents **found some items difficult** to access initially, but once things settled down there has been no problem. Food home **delivery slots** were an issue at first due to the sudden high levels of demand but this settled down quickly.

- Only the food delivery service was hard to get slots.
- No, make do and mend! No (x3)
- Yes. Toilet rolls, flour, eggs, kitchen towel and a whole host of things back in March 2020 when a few selfish people made it difficult for everyone.
- During the first week of lockdown yes, but other than that, I never had a situation where I could not find an item that I needed.
- In the beginning, we definitely struggled with the toilet paper shortage.
- Not really. We got all the essentials, and when we couldn't get what we needed we just used something else.



In normal times, before COVID-19 what were your primary activities on a day-to-day basis?

The main activities for people before the pandemic were shopping, meeting friends, cooking, going out for meals, gardening, going to work, volunteering, walking, reading, music, really *all the social things that makes life worth living*.

- Lots of farm/ soft play. Going out at weekends for meals.
- Volunteering; walking; reading.
- Working in residential homes with people with severe learning disabilities as a Music Therapist and with individuals with Acquired Brain Injury. Also running a singing group for people with dementia, and in a nursing home. I ran a music group for the Mental Health Group and a Singing for Lung Health group. Also volunteered in Stone Quarry Cafe.
- Work, going shopping, going out for lunch, walks, seeing friends.
- I was a manager in the energy industry. Managing a team of 175 people.



- I would go out most days in East Grinstead walking, and further afield. I went to weekly exercise and singing classes, volunteered at the museum, went shopping, met friends, ate out, had meetings with my COPD group, housework, cooking, and gardening.
- On weekends especially, we were always going to a gathering, wedding, or catching up with friends. I miss going to the coffee shops and talking to the barista. I miss smiling at strangers and meeting new people.

How has your daily life changed during the lockdown?

The pandemic and lockdown changed the shape of day-to-day activities to more home based as services stopped and the Government directive was to *Stay at Home and Local*. People reflected that their day-to-day activities tended to be centred around IT, Zoom virtual meetings and on-line schooling. This was something new for most people. They also said walking, reading, puzzles, crafts, and spending more time cooking filled their time.

However, some people *were working longer* hours due to increases in demand especially within the NHS.

- We walk more now. Play more outside in the garden. I've got a new hobby making wreaths.
- Yes - a lot more shifts to cover staff who were shielding.
- Severe reduction in volunteering: more walking, more reading, more Netflix.
- I had a lot of time on my hands alone.
- Worked throughout, stuck in doors during winter, not been to shops or out for lunch since last October, nor seen friends.
- The biggest impact has been the loss of my job. I use WhatsApp, Microsoft teams and Zoom far more to keep in touch with people. I also have more time to read the newspaper and doing the puzzle page.
- Nothing outside the house. I kept in contact with the group and with friends and family by phone and email and attend Zoom meetings. I have continued to do my funding help - volunteering - for the museum.
- There's been ups and downs. I've taken more time to spend with my little sister and have taken up some crafty hobbies like scrapbooking. I'm a little more

mindful and make better breakfasts as I learnt some new things during the first lockdown.

- Online school.

What have you found most challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Many parents have found it difficult to *balance home working and home schooling* during the lockdowns. *Not seeing family members* has been challenging for many as has not being able to socialise and meet up. Some people *have got bored* as they have run out of things to do.

Some *lack motivation and are frustrated* by the blanket Government directive for those who needed to shield due to a long-term health condition. For many in education, having to work online has been challenging.



- Just keeping my two boys occupied and I found home schooling the hardest.
- Not seeing or meeting family and friends.
- Keeping motivated to find other things to do.
- Having to deal with my in-laws on a daily basis.
- Lack of ability to meet people and socialise.
- Mainly the worry about the virus, and when things would get better in a sustained way. I have occasionally felt bored and frustrated with shielding over the winter and found it hard to motivate myself.
- Motivation to study.



What have you appreciated the most? What has helped you?

For many people they have *appreciated their gardens* as they have been at home and spent much more time working and relaxing in them than previously. The Stay-at-Home Government directive enabled some to *slow down their pace* and provided some *reflective time*.

Local community stores have benefited from the Lockdown as more people have used them or re-discovered them. They have also been a lifeline for some people.

Mindfulness, relaxation, and gratitude exercises have increased in popularity during the Lockdowns and provided much needed space for many people. As has going for walks and listening to nature. The Lockdowns have provided space for much needed exploration and to take pleasure in the simple things' life offers.

- Appreciated the support and had more time with my family and I like that life has slowed down for a bit. This gave me a break, particularly when allowed to have a bubble.
- Indirect contact with friends and family. New volunteering opportunities.
- Online shopping, *hooray for the postman* etc. Making use of smaller local shops like the bakers and co-op in Forest Row as well as Perryhill Farm Shop.
- My husband has been very supportive, and I have just felt very lucky to be in a comfortable home with no money worries, and plenty of contact with family and friends, in an area with a relatively low number of cases. Possibly for the first time, I am glad not to be young, as I know I would find not going out and seeing friends much more difficult!

I am never bored, always find something to do. I read and cook a lot. A bonus has been that I have had no flare-ups of my COPD, or chest infections.

- My husband's tree pollen allergy, always bad at this time of year, has been much helped, we think, by him wearing a mask.
- I've started a gratitude journal where I write one positive thing everyday which has really encouraged me to notice the little things. Some things I've written from the last few months include beautiful bird song, calming walks, listening to new music, funny videos, face timing family, receiving a lovely compliment, sending out handmade letters.



Have you used technology in new or different ways?

Prior to the Lockdown *fewer people had heard of Zoom*, but this has become a lifeline for individuals, community groups, businesses etc. The role of *online shopping* has also increased over the Lockdown periods.

- I used zoom to see people.
- Learnt to Zoom.
- Zoom, zoom, zoom.
- Zoom was completely new, have attended meetings, and hosted new work, used it for virtual tours and recreation.
- Online shopping.
- Through my work, I was already familiar with using video conferencing for meetings.
- Yes, have participated in Zoom meetings.
- I've had to learn to adjust to online school and use technology in that way.
- Yes, zoom meetings + chromecast.

Has COVID-19 changed your relationship with family, friends, and community?

Many people stated that their *relationship with family and friends has changed due to the Lockdowns*. Communication has been virtual or in the front garden, by telephone but there has been *no physical social contact*, something that many people have missed.

- No, but I'll appreciate them more now. (x2)
- Not really with friends and family, have found new ways to volunteer in the community.
- Harder to have any relationship, particularly with not so close friends.
- Not seeing my sisters or friends due to not being able to visit them.
- Not really, apart from the obvious issue of not going out or seeing anyone. I am confident of picking up where I left off when it is eventually possible.



- In a strange way, we're a lot closer, because whilst before we'd take each other's company for granted, we're now so grateful for those moments we shared and when we can once again, meet and be close, *we'll never take those moments for granted again.*
- Yes - I have a much smaller, but close-knit group of friends now, rather than the many friends that I wasn't very close with.

Do you think that COVID-19 has affected your mental or physical health and wellbeing?

A number of people shared that their *physical and mental health has been affected by the lockdowns*. Some have found they have more time on their hands, have *become more anxious, fatigue, less motivated, insomnia, negative thought patterns, comfort eating* and put on some extra weight (which has been upsetting), not as fit as previous. Some have used *self-care strategies* such as mindfulness.



There were highs and lows, during the first lockdown, I got into a good habit of working out every day, being more mindful etc, and generally was a lot more physically and mentally healthy. As time went on and fatigue kicked in, I lost motivation to keep up those healthy habits, stopped working out and eating well, which meant my mental health plummeted.

Also, with the situation around exams, I was constantly stressed out which contributed to mental health issues. The BLM (Black Lives Matter) movement was also heavy on my heart as racism is a really personal issue to me, although I'm very glad it's being spoken about more.



- Just got on with it really.
- Too much time on my hands: brooding over minor things.
- I'm aware that I get more anxious about little things, particularly driving or travelling a distance, probably as not used to it now.
- Not as fit, did lots of walking in spring and summer, but since the clocks went back and winter came have been in doors more.
- I have had periods of insomnia, and during the winter I found a tendency towards more negative thought patterns. Due to comfort eating and drinking I have put on several stone in weight.
- I have actually been more well, physically, than usual. I have been anxious about the virus frequently but have felt well able to manage this until it passes.



What are the moments you will not forget?

- The nice walks with my family, baking, exercising together.
- Two ward moves (actual moving the ward lock, stock, and barrel) to facilitate cancer provision.
- Seeing the London Road in East Grinstead empty on a weekday mid-morning. Seeing a police car on the outskirts of the town pulling over suspected lockdown breakers.
- Nothing specific.
- The empty streets during first lockdown, and watching spring coming in the woods around my house.
- The start of the first lockdown and how weird everything felt - almost apocalyptic! And then when I got my job.
- Those cosy morning routines we made when all our routines were lost. I appreciate nature a lot more now.

Have there been any positive outcomes or opportunities as a result of COVID-19?

For some, the lockdown has provided an opportunity to *try something new, rediscovering the natural world, developing links with their community, connecting with others*, and *being more grateful*. For some they do not yet know, as the pandemic is still active.

- I started making all year-round wreaths and selling them.
- I think we have rediscovered our love of the natural world (at least I hope so!)
- Developing a connection between the Lions club and the health professionals, to help deliver more community projects.
- I'm more determined to keep in contact with people and live life to the full, as we never know what's coming!
- No (x2). I am not sure that it's possible to tell yet. For me, I consider having got through this time without getting the virus as a really positive outcome.
- Definitely, I'm much more grateful.

Is there anything else you will continue to do differently as a result of this time?

People said that they will continue to do somethings differently such as *appreciating life, doing things together with their family*, continue to use the local shops, spend more time in the countryside, going for walks, using Zoom as a form of communication, and continuing washing hands etc.

- More walks, and doing more free things together.
- Appreciate life.
- Hopefully not! (Except for new community work...)
- Continue to use smaller local shops.
- Spend more time in the countryside walking.
- I think that Zoom meetings will continue.
- I will be more careful when I got out, washing/sanitising my hands more, and avoiding crowded buses.

When talking about this experience with others, how have you compared this experience to other events in your life or history.

- I've never experienced anything like this before.
- Nothing compares to this. (x4)
- There's nothing I can compare this to or draw any parallels.
- I haven't really talked to anyone about it, nor have I experienced anything with which it compares. I do remember the *Asian flu epidemic in 1957, when I was 10. My parents, my brother and I were all ill in bed at once, and a Home Help came to get us some food. I found this quite strange, as I didn't know who she was at all.*



What would you want someone 100 years from now to know about this pandemic?

People would like future generations to know that the COVID-19 lockdown *caused a lot of misery for some people*, that there were some *incredible efforts* as demonstrated by Sir Captain Tom Moore.



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That those in power needed to respond quicker than they did and to take the warnings seriously. That most of the population responded to requests to Stay at Home etc.

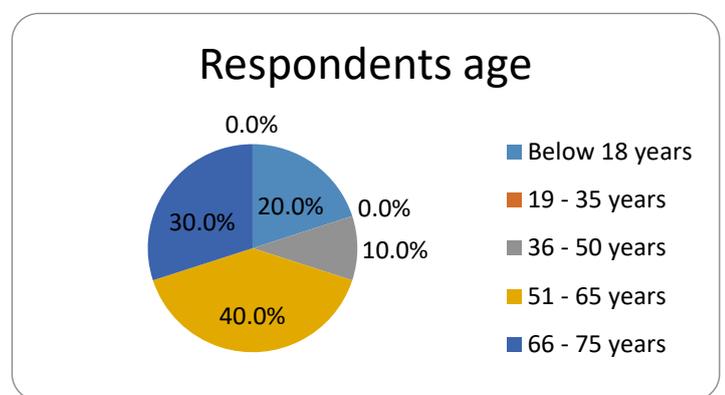
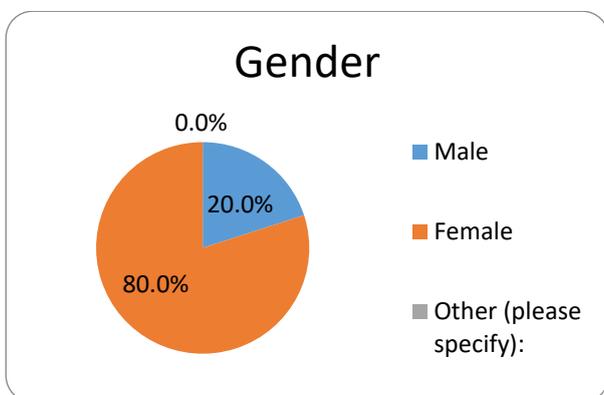
- How brave some people were.
- We just got on with it.
- Captain Tom's magnificent effort.
- Take the warnings seriously.
- How we managed to get through it (hopefully) by mostly being sensible and thinking of others.

- Be warned it could happen again. People need to follow rules.
- Early action is imperative. The sooner that the government acts, the sooner the pandemic can be brought under control.
- A small personal sacrifice in lockdown is far preferable to watching 10's of thousands of people suffer and die.
- How much misery and disruption it caused, and that this could have been lessened, if action had been taken earlier and if people had been more compliant with rules. I would want them to know how magnificently the NHS coped, along with other care staff, and everyone in jobs where they were at risk.
- It definitely isn't as good as it may look. I imagine there being an element of romanticising the pandemic in the future. The idea of no school and routine, plenty of free time, may certainly appeal to some- but the novelty wears off extremely quickly.

Is there anything else to share?

- A big moment memory for me was that I was walking in the forest with my family and a robin followed me, I gave it some food and it fed from hand. It brought great comfort to me. [Do watch the video.](#)
- I wish the government would show the nurses how much they appreciate them - by way of their pay!

Demographical characteristics of respondents





East Grinstead Museum



East Grinstead Museum aims to spark a sense of place and belonging in East Grinstead's past, present and future, through the stories we share.

As part of our response to the COVID 19 Pandemic, we have documented life in lockdown. We want to capture diverse experiences - sad or joyful - and to reflect East Grinstead's diversity. Contributions are welcomed from people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities.

To learn more about this exhibition email: info@eastgrinsteadmuseum.org.uk

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Here to make care better

We have a simple ambition, at Healthwatch West Sussex to make local health and social care services better for people that use them. We are here to listen, take action and influence positive change for local people living in West Sussex.

We record what people tell us and share this anonymously with those who make decisions about our health and care services.

You can contact us in several ways:

Telephone 0300 012 0122

Email helpdesk@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

Website www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

You can also follow our social media channels to always be updated with the latest in health and social care news across West Sussex: Facebook, Twitter.

If you have questions about the content of this update, please either call 0300 012 0122 or email cheryl.berry@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk