The Impact of Covid-19 on young people in Merton

Partnership for Young London

# Acknowledgements

This research was designed, carried out, and analysed by Merton's Young Inspectors. A group of young people	Introduction	01 - 09
who live, and learn, in Merton.	Key findings and recommendations	05 - 06
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# Introduction

I believe that it is not enough to listen to the voices of young residents in Merton. Young residents need to actively participate with senior decision makers to make Merton a better place for both adults and young residents. This research project explored the impact of Covid-19 on our young people who live or study in the London Borough of Merton. This peer research project was designed and conducted by us, the peer researchers, as we spoke to hundreds of young people face to face in interviews and focus groups, and over 2,000 young people in a survey. We want to thank all the young people who took the time to do our survey or speak to us in person.

One interview that stood out for me was with this girl, who was around 11 or 12. Whilst everyone around her was saying "Oh yeah, I spent a lot of time with my family. We had a lot of fun." She vocalised that she became a sort of third parent despite her young age, helping her brother make breakfast, helping her siblings with their clothes while still preparing for school herself. Far from being passive, the pandemic had pushed this young girl into having an active role supporting her family during this difficult time, a role that you wouldn't expect someone so young to have.

As well as gathering research, the research team consulted and reviewed the analysis with the Merton Youth Parliament to make meaningful change within the borough using the findings as our foundation. While we were going through the research, people were saying "Oh yeah, I agree this happened to me" and they added their own personal anecdotes just to show that it's happened to everyone. This isn't sort of a singular issue, or one group or person, the whole of Merton is experiencing this. The Merton Youth Parliament are passionate to make a change. We need to act and be the voice of young people.

We found that Covid-19 and the pandemic impacted and is still impacting everyone, regardless of age or their socio-economic background. However, it's important to note that certain groups were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. One data point that stuck out to me was how care experienced young people were more likely to say that they have to skip a meal because there isn't enough food. The whole point of our research was that we were getting the voices of different groups of young people like children in care. These demographics are often not represented, and yet are disproportionately affected by Covid-19 and the pandemic. There is no single answer to this issue for young people because the challenges you face, and the severity, change depending on who you are.

For me, there's three purposes for the report. One is to inform adults, those parents, teachers, and those that work with young residents so that they think "Is this how my child feels?" or "is this how young people in Merton were affected by Covid-19?" and "What should I do about it?" Secondly, the report is there for the young people to read it and be "Wow, this is my borough, I relate to this, this, and that. I'm glad my voice was heard because this is exactly what I told the researchers". We want to see their experience reflected in this report. Lastly, the report is a resource for senior decision makers to read and for them to make actual tangible change from. We want to see a response to the issues that were identified in this report.

Denise Vidal-Candengue Peer Researcher



### 4. Introduction

# **Key findings**

The impact of Covid-19 on health:

- Covid-19 negatively impacted the mental health of young people: Covid-19 and lockdown has had a negative impact on the physical and mental health of young residents in Merton. However, young people are feeling better, and are more active now that lockdown has been lifted.
- Young people look for support from friends and family over professionals: Over a third of young residents worried about their mental health during lockdown, feeling bored and isolated. They seek informal support for their mental health, speaking to friends and family.
- Food poverty is disproportionately experienced by different groups: One in ten young people has had to skip meals because there wasn't enough food, while one in twenty went a whole day without eating. Additionally different groups disproportionately are impacted by food poverty.

### The impact of Covid-19 on personal relationships:

- Lockdown brought many people together: Young people had more time to spend with their family, which was overall a positive experience. As a result of lockdown many residents got to build better relationships with parents or siblings.
- It was harder to see friends, and make friends: Young people were less able to see friends, and found it harder to make friends, however many relied on their friendships more during lockdown. As a result, this strengthened existing relationships, and support between friends played a huge role.

### The impact of Covid-19 on education:

- Many young people found the transition to online learning difficult: There was a mixed experience of online education and learning. Older young people and those who were impacted by changes in exams were more likely to have a negative experience of education during lockdown.
- Young people feel anxious about falling behind: Young people are worried about their education after lockdown. Many felt that, despite the often-good support provided by schools, that they had fallen behind in their studies.

### Safety in Merton, and the police:

- · There is a mixed experience of safety in Merton: Generally young people feel safe across Merton, however this varies significantly for certain groups of young people. Additionally, some young people also felt more anxious or worried about their safety outside because of Covid-19.
- Stop and search impacts on young people's view of the police: Young people are strongly divided on their views on the police, depending on their ethnicity, and whether they had been stopped and searched.

### Space, Place, and Our Merton:

- Green spaces were important for young people in lockdown: Covid-19 and lockdown made young residents feel positive about their local area, and the community that they lived in, and used local parks and green spaces more.
- Young people don't think that they have a say in decision making: Young residents feel excluded, and not listened to, when it comes to decisions that impact them locally. Their perception that their voice does not matter also means that they're less likely to want to get involved, whether that's having a say, or volunteering.

# **Merton Youth Parliament's** recommendations

The Young Inspectors presented the findings of this research to Merton's Youth Parliament to think about the changes that they want to see in the borough.

Meeting twice in November, they have come up with the following six recommendations.

- 1. An ongoing conversation: Going forward with the post-Covid-19 recovery, young people need to be continuously part of the decision-making process. A first step is for decision makers in Merton to meet with the young inspectors and young people who were part of this project to discuss the key findings and next steps.
- Young people speaking to young people: We spoke to over 2200 young residents in Merton 2. two years.
- young people don't feel like their voice matters or that they have a say. More needs to be done to communicate specifically to young people in the borough, so they receive information about the council and the work it does in a way that's accessible and relevant to them.
- 4. Young people participating in funding decisions: Youth Parliament members want to be part of towards the 'sense of community'.
- 5. see more support for underrepresented groups. Proposals are as follow:
- concerns. Proposals are as follow:
  - people,
  - reason.



during the past six months. For many of them it was the first time they had been asked questions in person by other young people about the future of their borough. Merton Council should continue to support young people to have these conversations, by replicating the approach of this project every

3. Reaching out to young people: Merton Council does seek the views of young residents, yet many

wider discussions on funding for youth groups and youth-based initiatives: in practice, this means members want to be included in discussions, and guide funding towards aspects such as working

Better support for our underrepresented young residents: Youth Parliament members want to

i. lessons on underrepresented groups to raise awareness and tackle xenophobia,

ii. forums to be held for underrepresented groups with the Council to give a voice and a platform to a. identify issues, and b. contribute towards solving issues.

6. Creating a better environment for all: Youth Parliament members want to tackle environmental

i. increase awareness of recycling and issues around littering targeted towards young

ii. proposed catchment areas around schools which would act as a zone within which pupils are required to use a low carbon way of getting to school if possible and within



# 6. Merton Youth Parliament recommendations

## What would make Merton a better place for the future generation of young people to stay?

We asked over 2000 young people what they thought would make Merton a better place for the future generation of young people to stay. There were four key themes in the answers they gave:

- 1. The environment: Young people cared about litter and their environment being cleaned. They wanted cleaner streets, less rubbish, and less pollution in Merton.
- 2. Spaces and places: Young people want more green spaces, more parks, and more places that they can go to like youth centres and clubs. They want more football pitches, and more equipment in parks. They also want activities to do in these spaces.
- 3. More of a say: Young people want to get involved in decision making, and feel like they have a say in what is going on locally
- 4. To feel safe: Young people want to feel safe locally, with a better relationship with the police, more street lights and even CCTV in areas like parks and alleyways.
- 5. The same as everybody else: Young people want improvements that any Merton resident would want to see, like better services, better transport, and more support for those who are in need.



well-being needs.

More engaging events for young people in secondary school.

Picking up all the rubbish

lower the house prices and make Merton a safer environment place to live in

More involvement for children in projects.

More activies that is inclusive and more home surveys so they can improve on small details

More parks and clubs

community

play around

Don't know

parks and no gangs

courts for free use

something like that

actually care

designed for them

in parks.

your right straight away

stop selling kids vapes!

If the teachers at school weren't rude Create more cycle paths that and the government and council connect to other boroughs in listened to us

More teenager friendly places, so clean the place there is rubbish they can go there instead of hanging everywhere and have more youth around on the streets. centres

Make it more interactive and safe. not getting pulled over by police for

having more places for children to

More accessible hubs to hang out in.

more observation of a specific are

Listen to peoples opinion, dont think

Better civic leaders who listen and

Cleaner streets, better equipment

To clean up the area a little more

and to let youths have a lot more

say in the projects that have been

I think if you were to care and ask

the youth their opinions and plans

together, in a positive way, educate

all about racism, the police and our

I would do some general cleaning

because I have noticed that the

No road men, council housing

Improving efficiency of public

More things for young people

intersections to decrease chance of

Parents making more of an effort to

educate their children on right and

wrong and how to carry themselves

transport/fixing problematic

about their borough we could all

impact into our enviorment.

streets are quite dirty

should be improved

verv high traffic

such as maybe cctv in a park or

stop and search for no reason More surveys and youths being

lively, I don't know how to but some more involved in the local days just feel gloomy and boring.

More youth clubs, more fun extra activities e.g helping in a fire station Increased police to stop harassment of homeless people and people with more activites for kids like trampoling dissabilities. More trees to increase air quality

more cameras in alleyways so

people who have jobs

officers for help

voungsters lives better.

receive more help with education,

cleaner streets, safer environment

and more protection. Also care

Letting kids have a say, let them

More opportunities for getting into sport, and not just the mainstream sports in the UK. Youth clubs would also be a good addition

more football pitches and basketball more surveys like this

free stuff provided for single mothers more places for young people to chill in

> Keeping the area more safe, other than that I like how Merton is right

Young people should start and act mature in the way of taking care of the environment and helping each othe

if there was more youth centers for or an activity place for the youth to go to

study spaces for youths.

if there were more people to help keep young people when getting sexually harassed because when it does happen it makes young people feel uncomfortable scared and panicked, especially when it is from older ,men . this has a major affect on my mental health and is the reason why i refuse to go out on my own

clean it up a bit and make it more noticable

there is so much rubbish dumped on cleaning around merton park area the streets and it stinks aswell. The because there is building up more prices for houses are expensive too. and more rubbish everywere

Stores, places to hang, more homes, more 493 and 57 and 131 facilities and protection stop littering and have a clean area

help and get involved

maybe it should be clean, engaging and more friendly because there has been crimes around merton so I dont feel safe, so for the merton

council, please do something that can make this area feel safe

of climate change. also make transport cheaper for working class Get more police, Merton is not safe at all. It's hard to find new friends.

youth clubs and more being done To make merton safer, being able to to take kids of the street as well as mental health, more activities to do more student engagement in a more friendly manne

> more police in and around the area as there has been a few situations where poilice on the road would have helped

express there feelings as kids know about some bad stuff from talking with freinds and stuff that happens outside school etc. This will have a centres huge impact and this will help other

> letting us have more say in the things we do and contribute with out

Better park facilities.

Including more buses for school children and involving them more in the community as they are the future generation

people stay safe while going to and maybe some more mental health services outside and inside of education sites like schools

I guess to make some areas more Less hidden alleyways, and more safe road crossings

> improve the enviroment preplanning for things such as: learning in a lockdown even though it is very unexpected, time

i dont know sorry

for jobs to be available to secondary children so we can earn and spend money that was not our parents especially if we are poor

being more active about environmental, social, and political issues

A range of activities. Most places seem to be restaurants and cafes and I would like to see a more diverse and active range of centers I would also like to see more green space and art.

Merton would be a better place if they became more focused on making it a fully sustainable place which can inspire other boroughs to do the same. For everyone to have access to a roof water and food.

A youth council maybe, I'm not sure cleaner, safer, and happier if that exists. People from years 5-13 environment with a higher quality education

Better public services for young children

More green spaces more police on the streets. harsher fines for littering.

The Wimbledon Chase train station could be improved.

make Merton more cleaner because i would like more people to be

If they listened to them more, and gave them more opportunities to

court at times For Merton to be made safer and maybe more activities for the

in a manner that does not come across as anti-socially

More participation in the community

More cool coffee houses and fewer chains. Less depressing shopping

the police being in our case

could be spent on getting ready for unexpected situations

making it more safe because there are a lot of weird men outside center

spaces. More surveillance and streetlamps

More support for those who are not privileged.

Being more inclusive or people with additional needs. Having sen equipment in playgrounds to make it more accessible for everyone. Have more SEN clubs so that we can have more regular days to meet our friends and have a safe environment to play. Have more SEN reduce knife crime and the amount timings at the swimming pool and sessions at the parks.

Cleaner, safer streets, more street lamps and police officers, more vocal/active support of marginalised groups and assurance that they will be protected

More activities for children and teens, more actions taken to improve the wellbeing of children and teens.

Cleaner streets and more places for younger people to meet up

Maybe a cleaner environment

A more friendly environment so people can feel safe when going to

The Environment, in town centres there is so much gas and smoke and when I walk past vans that collect bins the smell and gas smells awful

Having a cleaner area... and Making sure cars are parked nicely and no parked so you cant see when to cross the roadd

To have police around everywhere so it will be safe

having people watching the streets and making sure everyone is okay

More involvement and co-ordination between schools and safer/cleaner spaces

Be safer possibly and maybe more entertaining attractions

NOTHING

a home for homeless people

Some areas need to be updated. they feel outdated and don't appeal to people as much.

Having more open spaces.

More activities for young people after the pandamic

to help with mental health and making online safer

Make it feel like more of a safer place for younger people.

giving them a say in what happens to do at school and things to do

For less littering and for more people cleaner streets, more police, to follow the law-especially in times like the COVID crisis.

More sports centres such as basketball and public astro football pitches

More Parks and places to hang out with your friends

scared

Less trash and more friendly youth

they stay for hours and make some more equipment for the elder ones, and the ocean have no more plastic and make pollution gone forever

Put Phipps Bridge on a map and build more football pitches and mak Phipps Bridge a living space and get rid of them factories

More community centres?

Regulate policing in the are to of drugs rampant on the street to make children, women and babies safer. Also the pure amount of neglect most places get from the lack of policing requires more incidents to actually get police to care about the area of my residence In conclusion the police in the area have to do a better job than what they are currently doing

make it so we don't have to wear school uniforms

Having better parks which are more

Less racism, less fear and un-biased police

A shopping centre in morden

Listen to the youth who give good ideas

a cleaner environment to improve the mental and physical health of the younger generation

better schooling and a better way to deal with criminals and young offenders which reforms them instead of simple punishment

More clubs and have more activities

More mental health services, or at least more awareness of existing ones- I hadn't even heard of CAHMS before the pandemic, and I have no idea how to contact them now

Let more young people be in the council and let young people express their opinions and let democracy flow a bit more, meaning letting not as many people have as much power

More supplies to people in need and more less paying schools for people to have education because some people dont have education and homes so maybe you can make supply shelters and make London a happy place for everyone.

If young people were more involved in decision making of Mertons Community, I think we're the ones most affected by the future so to say

To have more technology and progress further younger generations would be interested.

More open spaces like parks and green areas. Also more places like cafes to hang out in.

Better/more crossing systems, shopping centres with shops more suitable for young people to hang out

More areas that you could congregate as some parks become very overcrowded at times

I'm not sure

Be able to go outside without being More green areas and safe streets

Young people making decisions on what they belief will better Merton.

## What's one good thing, and one bad thing about **Covid-19 and lockdown?**

At the start of interviews and focus groups, the young inspectors asked young people what they thought was one good thing, and one bad thing about Covid-19 and lockdown. This is some of what they said.

"One good thing is you can get a better relationship with your family. One bad thing is that you can't see your friends."

"One bad thing is, I'd say, not being able to do sports. One good thing is staying at home. I couldn't go out as much."

"One bad thing is that I woke up late every single day, so I couldn't do as much, but one good thing was school since it was all online."

"One good thing was relaxing at home, one bad thing was not seeing friends."

"I would say, one good thing is staying at home, one bad thing was not doing anything outside."

"One good thing was staying at home, but one bad thing was I wasn't able to go to my cousin's house."

"One bad thing was I missed school to be honest. One good thing, ah, there was no good thing."

"Good thing was that I got some time to myself. The bad thing was that I missed education. I fell behind."

"It was alright. It was alright because we didn't have to go to school. One good thing about lockdown is you can stay home and do online school. One bad thing about lockdown is you can't go anywhere. You always have to put a mask when you're with other people."

"I think the good thing about lockdown is that you can still see your family. The bad thing about it is that you are stuck indoors, and you can't do the same things that you've done before."

"I think it's a bad thing because it's been making people die. I think it is a good things that people can't all bunch up and it is a good thing because you're allowed to see your family and t I think you're allowed six people to see."

"Good thing about lockdown is not going to school, doing online school. Bad thing is lots of my family's friends died. That wasn't fun. It was just generally boring because you're stuck inside."

"The one thing that's good about lockdown is that we don't have to go to school or do a lot of homework. And the bad thing about lockdown is that you can barely see your friends and you have to stay three feet away."

"Spending time with my family, is good. Bad thing: I felt like I was trapped in my house all the time."

"A good thing about lockdown is that you don't have to go to school, but you can't go out to play football with a down side."

"A good thing is that I can just stay in my house and chill. But bad thing is I didn't get to talk to my friends or socialise as much as I'd like to."

"A bad thing is I didn't like the learning on the computer, and the good thing is that I didn't have to go outside as much."

"The good thing was school was a lot less stressful. And the bad thing was I had to stay at home. 24/7 so I couldn't get to see my friends."

"A bad thing, firstly would be, you can't really play football. The good thing is that you got to reflect on where you're at."

"Good I didn't have to go to school, bad thing is I couldn't go out."

"Good thing is I got to spend more time with family, but I couldn't go out to play football."

"Yeah bad thing is I just got very lazy."

"My stresses with school kinda went away. Bad thing was that I couldn't see my Nan."

"Good thing is that you don't really have to do much work, when doing school stuff. The bad thing was just being alone, it was repetitive, you're not going out the house much, it's boring."

"Good thing was I got more sleep, bad thing is I wasn't learning as much at home."

"One good thing was probably I got to play my Playstation more, bad thing was that I got abit lazy."

### 9. Introduction

# Methodology

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### Peer research approach

This research took a peer research approach and has been steered and conducted by young people who grew up and live in Merton. Over the past six months Partnership for Young London (PYL) and Merton Council have worked with a group of six young residents to design and conduct research and analyse the findings. This project has been guided by four key principles:

- the final say on all decisions.
- 2. Mutual respect for experience/expertise: This project recognised the value of their lived experience as young people who live and study in Merton, and the expertise they bring to the research. Their time is valuable, and the peer researchers were paid an hourly rate for their involvement.
- Informed decision making: Peer researchers were provided with training and support to make 3. alongside the decisions that they were expected to make.
- 4. of the research project as possible; research aims, designing methods, conducting interviews, analysing results, and report design.

### **Process overview**

The peer researchers have been supported with the design and fieldwork for this project over three key stages:

- Stage 1: Research planning and training: The peer researchers worked with PYL to decide on the key topics of the research and design the survey and interview guides.
- Stage 2: Fieldwork stage: The peer researchers, accompanied by staff from PYL, went to youth clubs, parks, and schools across Merton to conduct in-depth interviews and focus groups with a range of young people.
- Stage 3: Analysis stage: The peer researchers worked with PYL to analyse the data from the survey, interviews, and focus groups, coming up with the key findings and the structure of the report.

1. Power sharing: Our group of peer researchers have been equal partners with Merton Council and PYL in designing this work. It was not only vital that they be part of all decisions, but that they had

informed decisions at each stage of the process. It was vital that they are gaining skills and learning

Maximum involvement: This project aimed to get peer researchers involved in as many aspects



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## Stage 1: Research planning and training

Merton Council commissioned Partnership for Young London to conduct a peer research project looking at the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown on young people who live and learn in Merton.

The six outcome areas as set out by the Children and Young People's Plan 2019-23 were used to give a base framework for peer researchers, as they fleshed out which topics in each area, they wanted to explore the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown on. Overall, they decided to focus on:

Local young people were recruited from Merton's Young Inspector programme and were firstly involved in deciding on what they wanted to focus on. They decided to look at:

- · Being healthy: The impact of Covid-19 on mental health and wellbeing, and exercise
- · Staying safe: Feeling safe in Merton and the impact of Covid-19 on feelings of safety
- Enjoying and achieving: The experience of learning during Covid-19 and the impact of Covid-19 on hobbies and leisure
- Getting involved, having a say: The impact of Covid-19 on engaging with community/faith groups
  and other settings
- **Becoming independent:** The impact of Covid-19 on feelings about the future, and the relationship with parents
- My Merton: The impact of Covid-19 on friendships and leisure time

### **Training and skills**

Peer researchers, being Merton Young Inspectors, came with existing research and interview skills from previous projects. They were provided training on specifically the peer research method, and were supported to learn new skill as they made decisions about the research. For example, they took part in:

- **Introduction to research:** The peer researchers looked at research, why it's important, and the differences between qualitative and quantitative research.
- Survey design: It was important that we looked at how surveys were designed, and what good and bad survey questions looked like.
- **Conducting interviews:** Peer researchers learnt about in-depth interviews and focus groups, and gained hands on experience speaking to their peers across the borough.
- Analysing data: Peer researchers learnt about data analysis, before looking at survey data and interview data to come up with key themes.

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### Stage 2: Fieldwork stage - the survey

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### 2073 young people who live or study in Merton took part in the survey.

The survey took place between June and September 2021, with the majority of responses in August and September. We collected the following information from young people: gender, school year group, ethnicity, religious beliefs, disability, area of Merton, whether they have care experience, or are a young carer. This was used to look at the difference in responses in different groups and areas.

- School years: We asked young people what Year group at school they were, speaking to Year 5 to Year 13. The average age across the sample was Year 9, with our survey sample having slightly older young people and less in primary school. Those in year 12 and 13, we found that the majority (92.3%) were doing an academic course, while less than one in ten were doing a vocational course (7.7%).
- Merton schools: The survey had respondents from 42 different primary and secondary schools from across Merton. The majority of the results came from Ursuline High School (26.1%), Rutlish School (16.4%), Wimbledon College (15.2%), Harris Academy Morden (8.7%), St Mark's Church of England Academy (7.5%), and Raynes Park High School (7.1%).
- Gender: Slightly more young men (50.2%) responded to our survey compared to young women (43.7%), with a minority preferring not to say (2.7%), non-binary/third gender (1.9%), or said other (1.6%).

	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Chinese	Other/Prefer not to say
Survey sample	49.8%	13.1%	16.6%	13.7%	0.9%	5.8%
Key stage 3 student data	46.9%	12%	17.4%	18.2%	0.5%	3.8%

- Ethnicity: It was important to reflect the diversity of Merton in out sample. When we compare it to ethnicity data of secondary school students in Merton, we find our survey sample has a slight overrepresentation of White young people (49.8% to 46.9%) and an overrepresentation of Black young people (18.2% to 13.7%).
- Area of Merton: We had young people from every part of Merton in our survey, with the most common areas being Lower Morden (10.5%), Raynes Park (8.7%), Wimbledon Park (8.7%), Colliers Wood (8.2%), and Merton Park (6.3%). We had the least number of respondents from the areas of Hillside (0.3%), Trinity (0.3%), Longthornton (0.4%), Village (0.6%), and Abbey (1%). However, a third of respondents (28.6%) did not live in Merton, but studied there.
- Religious belief: Around a third (27.3%) of our sample said that they followed no religion, while the rest said that they followed Christianity (56.4%), Islam (10.6%), Hinduism (4%), Sikhism (0.6%), and Judaism (0.5%). A small minority (3.8%) said that they followed other and specified what religion they followed.
- **Disability:** Around one in twenty (4%) said that they identified as either D/deaf or disabled person. or have a long-term, with the majority said that they did not (91%) and a small minority said that they preferred not to say (5%).
- Care experienced: A minority (3%) of the sample said that they had been in care, with the majority (93.7%) saying that they had not been, and a minority (3.3%) preferring not to say.
- Young carer: Around one in twenty (5.2%) said that they were a young carer, with the majority (91.8%) saying that were not, and a minority (3%) preferring not to say.

## Stage 2: Fieldwork stage - interviews and focus groups

### Over 200 young people who live in study in Merton took part in focus groups or interviews.

Peer researchers went across the borough to conduct in-depth interviews or focus groups with young people across the borough. Interviews were semi-structured, with the interview guide being created by peer researchers and inspired by the survey that they previously designed.

On average the interviews lasted around 20 minutes, with focus groups varying between an hour to 15 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded for those above 16, and notes were taken for those below 16. The quotes throughout this report are taken from those interviews and focus groups.

• Total: The peer researchers managed to conduct 13 interviews, and 27 focus groups, in conversations lasting a total of 13.3 hours. This was turned into anonymised transcripts for analysis.

Age: They spoke to 60 young people aged 9 to 12, 60 between the ages of 13 and 16. The rest, over 80, were aged above 16. In the interviews and focus groups there was an under presentation of over 16s.



Places: The peer researchers spoke

to young people in a range of spaces and places, including three primary schools (Liberty Primary School, Merton Abbey Primary School, Bond Primary School), a high school (Richards Lodge), a college (Merton College), two youth clubs (Uptown Youth Club, Acacia Adventures Playground), three Merton Council Services (My Futures, Youth Offending Services, Children in Care), two SEND services (Persied Upper School, M.A.G.I.C youth project), and three sports projects (Fulham FC Kicks Projects at Harris Academy, Goals Wimbledon, Lavender Park).

well served by the survey, or might have been impacted by Covid-19 and lockdown differently. They conducted interviews and a focus group with young people with special education needs Council.

### Interview and focus group map

Specialist support: The peer researchers also tried to reach young people who would not be and disabilities, interviews with young offenders, and a focus group with Merton's Children in Care



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## Stage 3: Analysis stage

The peer researchers then came together to look at the survey, interview, and focus group data. It was important that they were given research skills to conduct the analysis themselves and decided on the key findings as they saw them.

### Quantitative analysis

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- Learning: The peer researchers learned about statistical analysis software (SPSS) and how analysis is done on quantitative surveys.
- Familiarisation: PYL presented the peer researchers with all the data from the survey, including • the basic percentages for each question, and all relationships that were found to be statistically significant (p-value of 0.05 or less).
- Interpretation: The peer researchers then wrote an interpretation of each data point and made a • judgement about how significant it was.
- Structure: They then organised all the data into a structure that they thought made logical sense, . which the final report would be organised into.

### **Qualitative analysis**

- Learning: The peer researchers learned about qualitative data analysis, like content and thematic analysis, and how to code transcripts.
- Familiarisation: PYL presented the peer researchers with completed anonymised cleaned • transcripts from the interviews and focus groups to read through.
- Interpretation: The peer researchers coded the transcripts looked for the key themes and ideas • that came out of each.
- Structure: The peer researchers brought all their codes together, and the frequency that they • occurred, to generate some structured key findings from the qualitative data.

The peer researchers also worked with Filmanthropy over two sessions to learn how about film making and were supported to create a video that features the peer researchers sharing their key findings. Young people from Uptown Youth Centre attending the filming day to share their experiences based on the key findings of the report.

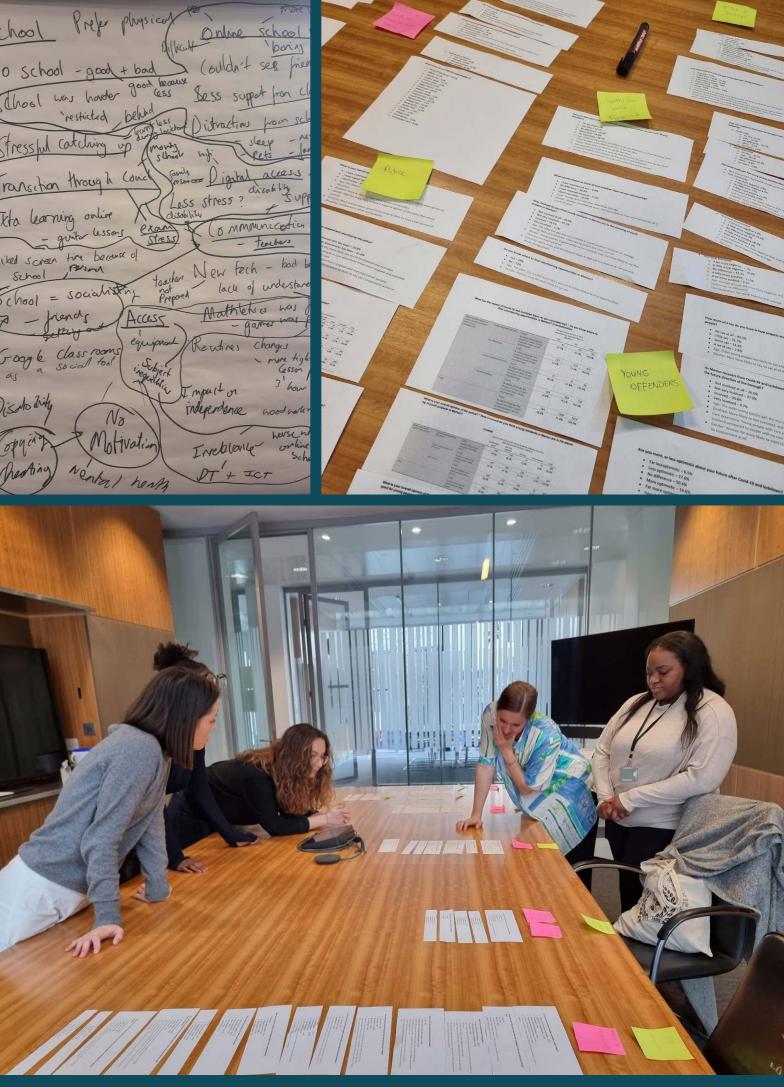


To do this, we created surveys and hosted focus groups.

To see the full video, please click the image or scan the QR code:



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# 1. The impact of Covid-19 on health

## Happiness during and after Covid-19

50%

40%

30%

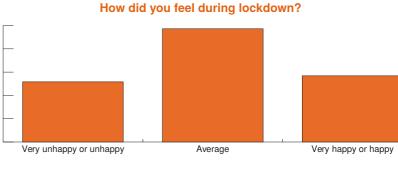
20%

10%

0%

Young people in Merton had a very mixed experience of lockdown, ranging from being bored to feeling more isolated and anxious about their mental health.

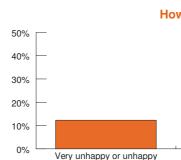
We asked young people how they felt during lockdown and one in four (23.8%) told us they felt unhappy or very unhappy, while slightly more than one in four (28.4%) said that they felt happy or very happy. However, certain groups were more impacted during lockdown than others. For example,



disabled young people were far more likely (39%) to say they were unhappy or very unhappy.

### "I have ADHD and it's mad. I got diagnosed when I was in year 5, and I was talking about how lockdown got me anxious. I was scared to get Covid, and when I used to eat around people, it made me feel weird."

This contrasts with how young people were feeling at the time of the survey, after lockdown in Summer, with two in five (39%) saying they now feel happy or very happy and only around one in ten (12.3%) saying they felt unhappy or very unhappy.

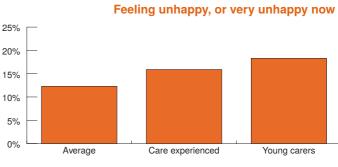


Clearly young people are

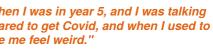
feeling far happier now than they did during lockdown. There was also a clear difference in the experience of the first lockdown compared to subsequent summer lockdowns.

### "The first lockdown we couldn't really do nothing so we just stuck at home playing games and stuff but the second one was pretty calm you could still go out and do stuff so that was alright."

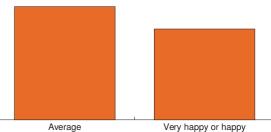
While all groups were more likely to feel happier now than during lockdown, certain groups were still more likely to be unhappy or very unhappy such as disabled young people (24.4%), care experienced young people (15.9%), and young carers (18.3%).



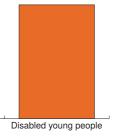
Young people who were unhappy during Covid-19 and lockdown were more likely to say that they were unhappy now.



How are you feeling now?



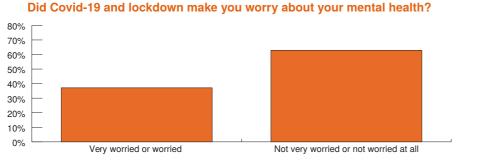






## The impact of Covid-19 on mental health

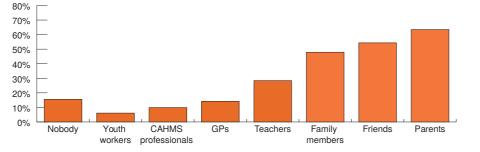
Almost two out of five (37.1%) young people said that they were worried or very worried about their mental health during lockdown. Young people who said they felt unhappy during lockdown were far more likely to had been worrying about their mental health during this time



We found in our interviews and focus groups that Covid-19 and lockdown that young people's mental health was most impacted by the health risks of Covid-19. Some young people were worried about getting the virus, others about giving it to family and friends. A few young people even spoke about how they suffered a bereavement as a result of the virus, and the impact that had on their mental health.

> "I felt really scared of Covid during lockdown. Because my Dad actually passed away during lockdown because of Covid. Yeah, I had no idea it was that bad, I thought it was just a cough or a sneeze, but he had a heart attack because of it. So that had a really big toll on my mental health."

Young people are most likely to seek support from parents (63.5%) followed by friends (54.3%) and family members (47.9%). They are far less likely to turn to professionals such as teachers (28.4%), GPs (14.1%), CAHMS professionals or mental health workers (9.9%). or social workers or youth workers (6.1%).

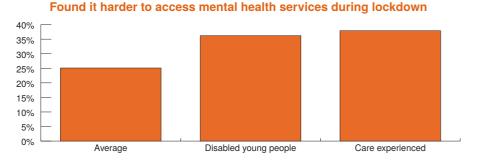


Who do you trust to ask for help with your mental health?

Worryingly one in six (15.5%) said that they had nobody that they trusted with their mental health, with young men more likely than young women to say nobody.

> "If you just want to get something off your chest, or you just need to be listened to, you love your friends and your peers. But sometimes you need a responsible adult, who can tell it how it is.'

One in four (25.1%) also told us that they had found it harder or much harder to access services for their mental health. Groups like disabled young people (36.2%), and those in care (37.9%) were more likely to find it harder.



"But watching people around me that have been on the news suffering and watching how many families were impacted...

This really happened and those families that were not eating properly, not having money for gas, and stuff like that, I find that really depressing."

## What help or support would you like to see from schools for your mental health?

We asked over 2000 young people what help or support they would like to see from schools for their mental health. There were five key themes in the answers they gave:

- 1. Work support, especially at exam time: Many young people spoke about the workload they face, and how it contributes to their stress or anxiety, and how they really need a break. This was especially for young people who had exams during lockdown.
- 2. Workshop, learning, and reflection: Young people want to see more emphasis on mental health during class time. Some wanted workshops to learn more about managing their mental health, or to reflect on mental health as a class, or to discuss mental health in assemblies.
- 3. Anonymised and private support: Young people value privacy and the ability to seek support in an anonymous way. Whether this is a anonymous helpline, survey, or just simply a way of talking to someone about their challenges without fear of being identified or repercussions.
- 4. More understanding: Some young people spoke about simply wanting more understanding from staff about their mental health challenges, especially when it might of prevented them from completing work.
- 5. A single place to go: Some young people want a single place to go to for your mental health in school, where they can go to speak to someone, or others.

going x teachers

ISSUES ee ess people really Idk someone telling

ask

Everyone wear masks and social distancing. also we need everyone to wash their hands every 10 minuetes and use hand sanitizer

a mental health teacher that you can visit during recess/after school and alk about if you have an issue and the teacher can help

maybe the teachers should do check good. The transport system is quite in on students mental health as some students are scared to ask for help.

I want them to have genuine conversations with us not just quick conversations that dont help much

allow people to go to services that will help their mental health and not go to school if they desire

to have someone for people with

dont stress us as much with small things like 60s because of chewing aum or food

like a talking time where people share their feelings and just how they been doing basically like rehab

that you would be able to leave lesson and be alone in a comfortable More support room for the day if u are unhappy

Stop giving us loads of work expecting us to know it, you have to teach us aswell

More open discussions about it and its relivance to talk about our mental

get rid of those booklets we do in tutor, create a safe room with someone equipped to talk to kids about mental health

Mobile devices should be permitted. Additionally, use of toilets should be permitted during lesson time

Treat every child differently and don't punish them all for one or two children's behaviour as you don't know it affects us individually.

More places to talk about the virus and how it affect students and

We should be offered the school requirements for equipment

Relaxing and quiet places at break and at lunch. Less punishments for small issues.

Just listening to students and not act more focus sessions on mental like everything is "back to normal". health and different kinds of health

more free time inbetween lessons such as longer breaks/lunch

To have time where students are able to privately talk to teachers about anything bothering them

It should be allowed to wear your pe kit to school because its unhygienic to change in school

Wear PE kits to school. I am insecure about getting changed in changing rooms.

every period take 1 or 2 people out of the class to ask how there feeling.

Mental Health programes/ assemblies

Sessions about mental health every

School being more understanding

To have more assemblys and to have more talks in class about it

Less homework - homework makes ne feel very anxious and stresse Also, I have been struggling to get to school on time, even if I give myself over an hour to get to school, I only arrive a mere few minutes before school starts if the bus service isn't unpredictable, as I have had to wait come sometimes. It would be good if late detentions were not given out so often or only given if you are late

multiple times in a week

to help spread that word that om shy i dont like doing stuff that includes going in front of the class gives me

Don't do examen, it doesn't help at adhd atc to talk to when they need to all. Need something to do at break, feels like having no break would dont stress us as much with small make no difference. we can get help

> More after-school clubs to be reopened as they help with socialising in a comfortable environment where everyone ha a mutual interest in the subject of the club

eed to be more considerate about

tioned the time taken up by

Organise sessions/groups to talk about mental health issues

anonymous questionnaire

suppor

More subtle and less overwhelming

Allow students to live in the moment

rather than making them anxious about what might take place in the future with regards to covid and

other people situations

have done the homework I have about 2 hours to talk to my friends and family and I havenat (ie. improved communication) can provide some essence of stability in a time with little to none at hand. This can help a lot with peace of

I would like an added class where the teachers talks about mental health with a small group of people that also have mental health

Try and consider students' menta h during exam time rather that telling us just to revise.

I would like for schools to acknowledge mental health to actually help us with the stress of

Therapy or being asked by the school therapist how we're feeling. more mental health support during

of shouting at them.

More online lessons, as an introvert it makes me feel alot better exam seaso

I get help from outside of school so I don't really need anything from the our mental health rather others

reality

Private mental health meeting at lunch or break if you want

that can appear in the future such as stress

Actually caring students instead of shooting them down at any little

safeguarding and counselling teams could regularly hold 1 to 1 me okay and offer support because most of us are too afraid to ask

about where to get help in schoo

Stop the constant stress e.g constantly reminding us about exams and deadlines.

Maybe a club where people disc

stuff about that specific topic

A clear place to go to and someone trusted to talk to.

i would like there to be a more open less homework because it stresses place for people to share their issues us out esspecally in year 10/11 and get support

Awareness lessons of some mental

Have an anonymous, consequence

22. The impact of Covid-19 on health

just to try and offer more services such as a helpline if you need more sleep or trouble at home

Just to not put students under pressure or be angry at them for

where people can privately talk and that this room should be easy to

Places where you can speak to telling other people about your in danger there is 0 reason to tell somebody about ones private life

The school is very great with hand along with mental health but I don't really think it teaches us about how

more focus sessions about it

None, they're doing enough

Bring in famous people that advocate for mental health to speal to students about the importance of mental health and its effects.

more check ins and more focus on

more people to talk to about mental health or lesson based on mental

o actually support students instead

Maybe they can add mental health support to every student.

maybe somewhere to go if your not felling good or unhappy

I dont have any mental health but I feel like if theyre trying to help us then maybe do something fun that could make us feel us better like do extra curricular sports or do your favourite subject more fun in my

I would like to see the teachers bring stressful/unmanageable more equipment out so that we wo always be on our phones at break and lunch

They could for the fist week they and be more supportive and helpful when we are late

more workshops and more face to face conversations to tackle mental health problems

They say they will help and not get your parents involved but it never really happens.

their mental health problems

More specialist support for those More mental health awareness's and with ASD and other disabilities. more people that students can trust

eachers taking it seriously, meaning that no matter how busy they are they should help children/teenagers mental health

I feel like school counsellors would be quite good for some people, or there should be rooms where you can go to be alone. Or we should be able to take at least one day off every month for our mental health if we really need it.

Being more open about mental health issues or conditions that about it more so that we feel more comfortable if we need to reach out to anyone

Not only just during covid times, but a general thing- but teachers should have a psychology training and get educated on mental illnesses and how that can affect students daily lives. I'm tired of being talked to about mental health, which only involves a mild level of stress ering a friendship or exams Pupils have MENTAL ILLNESSES and not just a slight level of stress. The teachers' lack of knowledge school and change little things like about this, ends up them invalidating no seating plan or long break students' struggles.

Talk in a supportive way about what has happened during assembly

Fun school trips, to help us relax and I feel like there should be more forget about exam stress for a bit.

Schools should be teaching students more breaks and cheaper lunch life skills and prepare them for

I do not know

help with anxiety

More support and guidance with exams - too much stress

to keep things private and confidential

more immediate help with mental health issues

More talks about mental health as a When a student goes to the studer class so we can relate to each other.

they should be more understanding when someone doesnt do a certain thing due to lack of motivation/ depression

would like to see more activities that can be done as a group and more asking about wellbeing

where we have do revison on top of home work and school work

better councillors who support privacy but arent too pushy about mental health, too much pressure doesnt help

They could not pressure us with homework as it stresses many students out, going to school is already enough so there is no reason to do more work at home

being more understanding if a student isn't feeling mentally well and helping them more

Listening to my educational needs have support groups for children that and acting on them with haste, to dont feel comfortable talking about show that they care

We could be offered workshops with professionals who know how to support us properly, more accessib and anonymous support from school

More pastoral support.

earn the students trust and keep the things they tell you just between you and them

daily check ups in form period at the beginning of the day because some days I am better than other days

A high standard of training for all staff members, regardless of whether they are in pastoral roles As many students will feel more comfortable talking to different members of staff for all kinds of reasons. For boys schools in particular, more one-on-one/sma group opportunities for boys to speak about their wellbeing and be asked by staff if they're doing okay

Umm have a guidance councilor for everyone and employ nice teachers let kids choose what teacher they want

Listen to students ideas to change

chat with each student every couple of weeks about their mental health

anonymous means of talking about your problems.

Listen to how someone feels and not to judge them on it and to provide free help from schools because some family's aren't paying attention

classes to teach us things i think are more important such as morals and how to treat people. also an easier grading system and being able to no be scared to get into trouble. i also wish we had extended break times because now we only get 20 mins for lunch and break

office and they are sick, let them go home even if it's a headache should be more people to talk to and because the only reason why the would let a student go home is if they have vomited and I don't understand why it should get to that level of sickness

> to have a mental health week where in lesson we focus on our mental nealth and how we can gain help

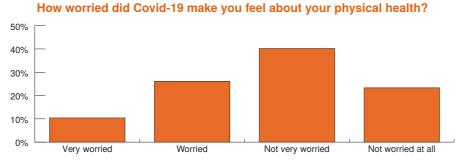
> Ask individuals how they are feeling if they need to speak to anyone and have a place where if they ar feeling down or bothered about something they can go to and sit

## The impact of Covid-19 on physical health

During lockdown young people were less able to go out and exercise and remaining indoors has a clear impact on their physical health and wellbeing. Over a third (33.9%) of young people said that Covid-19 had made them feel more negative or a lot more negative about their health and general wellbeing, though half (51.3%) said that Covid-19 made no difference to it.

### "Lockdown made my fitness worse. I just started feeling lazy."

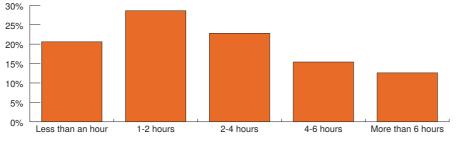
Similarly, over a third (36.5%) of young people said that they were worried or very worried about their physical health during Covid-19 and lockdown. Worries ranged from feeling more unfit due to lack of exercise, eating too many snacks, or getting the virus. However, a majority (63.5%) said



that they were not very worried or not worried at all about their physical health during this time.

### Exercise during lockdown

Young people told us that they got less exercise during Covid-19 and lockdown, as it was harder with their gyms and their local sports clubs being shut. One in five (20.6%) young people said that they got less than an hour or no exercise during Covid-19 and lockdown. while almost half (49.2%)



How much exercise did you get during lockdown a week on average?

of the young people in the survey got two hours or less of exercise.

The amount of exercise a young person got varied across different groups, with young men getting more exercise than young women overall, and White young people far more likely to get more exercise than Black or Asian young people.

Furthermore, young people who did two hours or less of exercise were more likely to say that Covid-19 and lockdown had a negative impact on their health and were more likely to be worried about their physical health.

### Sleep and routine

One of the most common things we heard about the experience of young people during lockdown was that they were bored. The words bored or boring came up over 75 times in interviews and focus group and was usually the first reaction to questions about their lockdown experience.

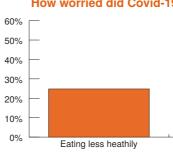
> Sleeping, just sleeping. Wake up, eat a little bit, sleep again. Go on your phone for a bit, sleep again. That's just how it was.

However, we also heard about irregular sleeping patterns, late nights, and increased screen time before bed which meant that while many were sleeping more, the quality of sleep was mixed. This seemed to have a real impact on the mood and mentality of young people we spoke to.

## Food and diet during lockdown

Young people had a mixed experience of healthy eating during lockdown overall, with many eating more healthily with their parents at mealtimes but eating more snacks or treats throughout the day.

Overall while young people told us that they were eating less healthily compared to eating more healthily (24.7% to 15.5%), the majority (59.7%) said that lockdown made no difference to how they are.



We found that the older a young person was the more likely they were

to say that they were eating more healthily during lockdown, and that young women to say that they ate less healthily.

Young people's diets in lockdowns became far more tied to the choices of their parents, as they were not able to make their own decisions with shops and takeaways being shut, and not making the journey into school Over a third (36%) said that they had eaten more junk food during Covid-19

and lockdown, with young



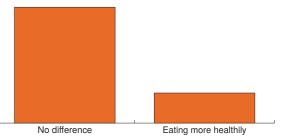
women more likely to say that they had.

"My mum noticed I was putting quite a bit of weight on so she tried to like encourage me to eat healthy foods and stuff so just eat a lot of kiwis and almonds and grapes and stuff."

This reflects what we heard in interviews, where junk food and snacks became an activity for many young people who were bored indoors.

"I used to eat well, but during lockdown it was just boring so I was just eating."

How worried did Covid-19 make you feel about your physical health?



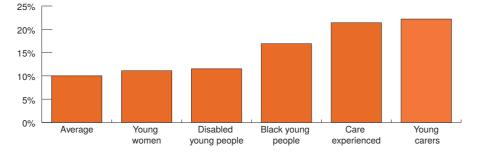
## **Food poverty**

We found that many young people living and studying in Merton face food poverty, skipping meals or not eating for a full day because there isn't enough food. We only asked secondary school students as it was not appropriate for primary school students.

Firstly, one in ten (10%) young people said that their meals were smaller, or they had to skip meals because there wasn't enough food, while one in ten (10%) were not sure.

However, different groups were more likely to tell us that they had eaten less or skipped a meal: young women (11.1%), disabled young people (11.5%), Black young people (16.9%), care experienced young people (21.4%), and young carers (22.2%).



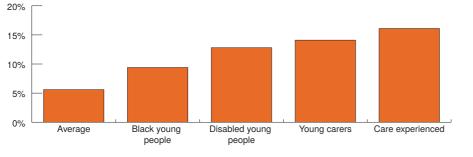


Secondly, one in twenty (5.6%) young people said

they had to not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough food, while one in twenty (5.5%) were not sure. Unsurprisingly all those who said they have had to not eat for a whole day also have all skipped meals because there was not enough food.

Once again, different groups were more likely to tell us that they had not eaten for a whole day because there wasn't enough food. like Black young people (9.4%), disabled young people (12.8%), young carers (14.1%), and care experienced young people (14.1%).





"I was lucky enough that I was getting support from a local food bank. So they would bring me food once a week, like the general stuff, but there's not everything that you eat in there or that you will want or need."

## Young people turned to screens during lockdown

Many young people turned to their screens during lockdown, from their televisions to play video games, their computers to attend school, or their phones to socialise.

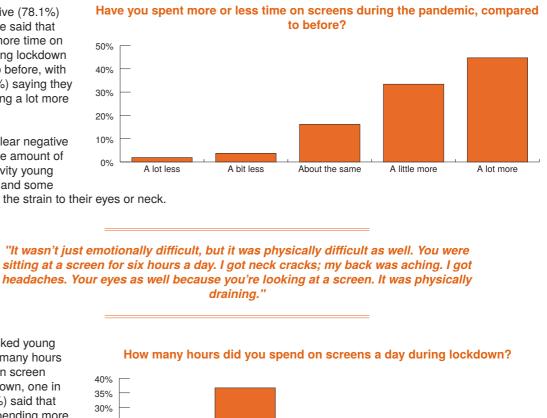
Four out of five (78.1%) young people said that they spent more time on screens during lockdown compared to before, with many (44.7%) saying they were spending a lot more time.

This had a clear negative

impact on the amount of

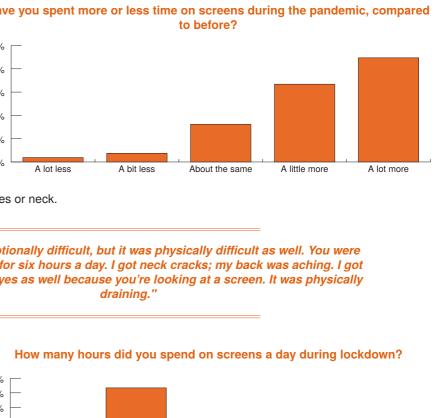
physical activity young

people had, and some



spoke about the strain to their eyes or neck.

When we asked young people how many hours they spent on screen during lockdown, one in three (29.8%) said that they were spending more than 12 hours a day on screens. Certain groups with more responsibilities in the household. like young carers, saw smaller increases in the amount of screen time during



40% 35% 30% 25% 20% 15% 10% 5% 0% 0 to 3

lockdown compared to the average.

### Screens as a social lifeline

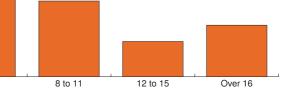
Yet while increased screen time may of negatively impacted the physical health of young people during lockdown, many of them told us how screen time was a lifeline for their mental health during lockdown. In part it was an activity and something to do in a time where everything was shut.

4 to 7

Yet the most important aspect of screen time was in providing a social aspect outside of the household that provided young people a way to keep in touch with their friends. Young men spoke about playing with friends online, while all young people spoke about talking on WhatsApp or social media with friends.

"It was tricky over lockdown to see my friends, so when I could see my friends online, I was very happy."

In some cases, screen time would help young people connect with family in other households too, especially older relatives that they could not visit because of fear of spreading the virus to them.



### Merton Children in Care Council

We spoke to the Merton Children in Care Council, a group of six young people aged 16 to 25, about the impact of Covid-19 on care experienced young people in the borough. We found that Covid-19 had a disproportionate impact of children in care, who were more likely to rely on services that were impacted during lockdown. However, many of the key issues they spoke about pre-dated Covid-19 like how care givers are involved in fostering.

### Lack of informal support and mental health support

While we found that many young people relied on their friends and family during Covid-19 and lockdown, many of those in the Merton Children in Care Council could not rely on informal support from their family. Especially for those young people who had to shield, tasks such as getting groceries delivered could be far trickier or costly.

"So, I don't keep in contact with my family because I don't really have family."

We found that young people in care did have a strong sense of reliance on their peers and friends, however often the challenges they faced required formal support. Many were far more reliant on social services, being a young parent, or in I need of food bank services. Access to these services was impacted by Covid-19 and lockdown, which had an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of many care experienced young people.

"I just feel like there should be more services...There are more for behavioural issues, than mental health, I'll say. You don't actually have an organisation that just deals with mental health in Merton, not that I know of anyway."

The Merton Children in Care Council also felt that existing mental health services need to be expanded and believed there was a general lack of promotion or awareness of the support available.

Many would turn to other professional health services like GPs, but often experienced insufficient support of either not being referred or not receiving the appropriate treatment. Others would not go to healthcare professionals, believing GPs were there only for what they thought were "more serious issues".

> "You go to doctors [saying] I'm struggling with my mental health, and they just slap a packet of tablets."

### Challenges with the care system

The Merton Children in Care Council raised many issues that they felt needing changing with the care system and social services. Firstly, they told us that a lack of consistency and familiarity was negatively impacting their experience of the care system. Changing families and social workers made young people feel "tossed around" and prevented young people from building those trusted relationships that are key to them seeking professional support.

> "Going to so many different families, having so many different social workers. You know, it gives you trust issues, attachment issues. Now, the age that I am right now, it's really affecting me, especially in relationships, [...] I'm starting to put links together, like my childhood and the way I am now."

Covid-19 also brought challenges with the shift to remote and online working, with many telling us about the importance of in person contact to build personal and trusting relationships with social workers or caregivers. They placed less importance on the skills or procedures of social service, and more on the trust in those relationships.

"And when you're so settled with someone or family and then they just move you on, for like, practical reasons. It just doesn't make any sense when you look at the big picture."

Expanding on the procedures of being assigned to foster families, many instances were raised for the need for more careful and suitable selection of placement. A desire for having similar cultural backgrounds has been mentioned to be important towards feelings of being understood and feeling accepted. Moreover, the instance of family members as obvious caregivers without more careful consideration has been flagged to be highly problematic.

"The situation that I went through could have been easily avoided if they just went and took those slight extra measures just to check if that person was mentally capable to take care of a [child] that was going through puberty."

Apart from careful selecting the appropriate family to the young person in care, the need for equipping foster families with (social) skills was raised as highly necessary as well, especially concerning families who do not have children of their own.

> "I feel like those types of foster carers need more training because 1) they've never dealt with a child before. 2) It's not just any child. We have trauma. We've been through things that most children haven't. So they're dealing with those two things: the child and the trauma"

This was especially lacking when potentially being in foster care together with siblings, when the burden of dealing with trauma falls on other siblings.

"In my own prepubescent mind, I don't even know how to absorb and deal with trauma yet, but I'm looking after my sibling, because this foster carer was not trained on how to do that."

Many young people also expressed the need for professional support around trauma, especially in situations which require restoring family relationships and personal recovery.

### "I'm a child talking to another child, and trying to act as a professional, that's insane."

Although there was no mention of direct improved experiences, most experienced massive improvements of social services compared to when they entered the system. Most young people in in care are committed to help future generations and are passionate about both sharing their stories, reaching out to those going through similar experiences

> "So as much as our trauma and upbringing in the care system isn't the best for some of us, we can only hope that the younger generation has it better and Merton social services have improved massively from when I first come into it."

# **2.** The impact of Covid-19 on relationships

# Young people spent more time with family

20%

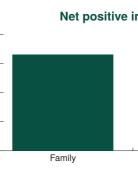
15%

10%

<u>0%</u>

During lockdown, being stuck in the house, young people ended up spending far more time with family which we found was a generally positive experience.

We found that consistently a third of young people told us that there was a positive or very positive impact from Covid-19 and lockdown on their relationship with their family (30.3%), parents or guardians (31.2%), or general family life (31.9%).



However, there was also a

consistent minority that told us there was a negative or very negative impact from Covid-19 and lockdown on their relationship with their family (13.8%), parents or guardians (12.3%), or general family life (17.2%).

> "I spent so much time with my family. Before my sister would always be in her room, I would always be in mine. And my parents would be downstairs. But because of Covid-19 and because we spent most of our birthdays inside, we had a game night that we would do.

It was so much fun spending time with them and being able to talk to them. Now I'm so much closer with my mum, I always tell her about my mental health, about what happened at school. When I get home, she's first person I go to. And that's because of Covid-19 and me being able to talk to her more."

Many we spoke to use the time that they spent with family to bond, learning from their siblings or taking part in activities with parents. As family was many young people's only social interaction, as they could not see their friends, it became more valued. Although, not everyone had the same experience and a minority spoke about the rising tensions in the household.

> "My mum's a teacher, so she also had to teach on zoom, my brother had to do online school and we didn't always have enough computers. So, we couldn't all do the work at the same time. Because there were so many constraints, there was a lot of head butting, and it made us a bit less close."

### Net positive impact of Covid-19 and lockdown



Parents or guardians

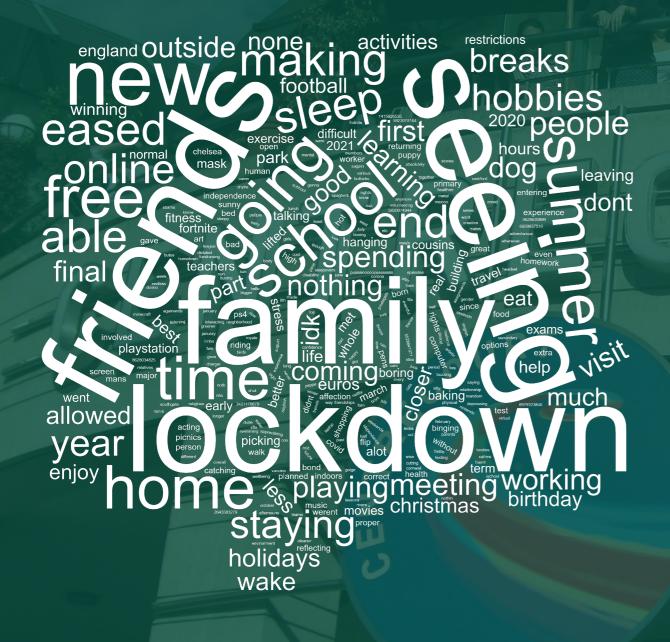
Family life

### 31. The impact of Covid-19 on relationships

## In a word or words, what has been the best part of the past year?

We asked over 2000 young people what had been the best part of their year. There were three key themes in the answers they gave:

- 1. Spending time with family: Young people told us that spending time with their family during lockdown, or seeing family members again after lockdown was lifted was one of the best parts of their year. Some young people enjoyed their parents working from home, and the opportunity to see them more as a result.
- 2. Spending more time at home: For many young people not having to go into school and staying at home was one of the best parts of the year. Young people enjoyed having more free time to reflect, speak to friends, and play video games.
- 3. Lockdown being lifted: The best thing of the year for many young people was lockdown being lifted and the freedom that came with it. Young people felt relieved to go outside, see friends, and take part in activities.



seeing my dad being able to see my friends and family again after lockddown i got a boyfriend

spending time with friends online Staying at home and not having to go to school physically

Doing well in English end of year assessments.

When i came back to school as I had being able to come out of lockdown more time outside and with sports. and see my friends and go out with my family again and staying home doing no school

Perfect, i dont have to see anybody which is supercalifragilisticexpi

Staying home

tutor time eating sweets

staying inside staying at home

staying with my family at home

playing more football

seeing my family and joining a club outside of school.

finding out i'm having another sibling

no school

Staying at home

i dont know spending time with family and

friends, and finding more time to watch ty lol.

spending time with family

meeting new friends

absolutely nothing

I'd say that over the past year the best part of lockdown has been being able to spend more time with my family and the people i live with. not only that but it has also helped me to start appreciating the area around me a lot more and realising how good it is to have the things i have around me

more time with family

Arsenal beat spurs 3-1

no school in first lockdown

**Online School** seeing my family

I think lockdown has been very positive because no school has been great to spend my time to enjoy myself and socialize more online and in person. No school as showed be the benefit of how to enjoy your life to the best.

watching movies all the time. losing a lot of weight

Playing FIFA and Minecraft

there has been no best part of my year. i guess expect my birthday nothing has been good expect for ph lock down ending

getting to relax at home continuing my education even during being able to see friends again

going out and actually doing stuff that i like doing

Having the free time to do my hobbies

covid

going out with friends and family

i got to spend time with family

my birthday

my dog and playing online/real life helping and meet of Covid.

Wake up, get laptop login into teams me school without leav of my bed) Going outside more

friends and family

meeting new friends

Knowing who my tru

Gaming at home

nothing 2021 was horrible for me l don't know

nothing but being able to see every Having more family

when lockdown was lifted Sleeping more when lockdown ended and when we spending time with were allowed to go out

Spending time with

Going back to norm restrictions lifted! :)

No homework and

I have bonded more

wake up so early

Chelsea winning the champions league

more time spent with family

Coming back to school to see my

spending time with my family

seeing my friends and cousins

My family and friends

Family and Me Time

exercise indoors.

sports and extra activities

Lockdown gave me alot of spare

I got a virtual headset so I can

spending more time with family

When lockdown was eased then i

could visit my friends and cousins

Being home and catching up on

I have got to spend much more time

summer when the sun is out

more time with family

hobbies more

with my family

with friends

nothing

time so I could spend more time on

england getting to first major

international final in 55 years

with my family

new bond.

Online learning.

sleeping or eating or watching tv

one again was good

vibing with my family

lockdown

Meeting new people school

Getting to go to school and meet when my cousin was my friends and getting to meet my relatives and go out and spend time Finding myself

> easy work and very simple life

friends and overall hanging out with the whole class together, building a Getting a puppy ove My friends and famil

Being able to go out

Spend more time and fun with my Spending time with

family, getting close getting involved in s

spending more time with my family Lockdown, I got to st

Netflix

Spending more time with ny family Spending time with More free time

It hasnt been good maybe it was reflecting and being in peace e time with my fan

seeing people

late march to augus then november 202 december 2020

getting to see famil after a long period been a good year to

mental and physica Spending quality tir

ones

Finally getting to see

months so bonding spending alot more

Volunteering in my r

have never met if it

probably the park wi

i have a kitten and n

again

playing games and

being stuck with my

spending more time during lockdown

Spending more time

Spending lots of tim

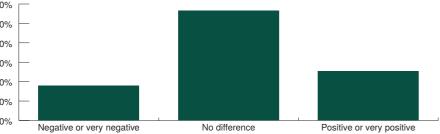
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## Friendships during lockdown

Covid-19 and lockdown had a clear impact on the friendships that young people have, and a young person's ability to make friends. Young people were not able to go out, and see their friends, and social media apps became vital to keeping in touch.

Young people were mixed on the impact of Covid-19 60% and lockdown on their friendships, with around on in 50% four believing it had a positive 40% impact (25.4%) compared to less than one in five (17.9%) 30% who thought it had a negative 20% impact. However, a majority 10% (56.6%) said that it made no 0% difference.



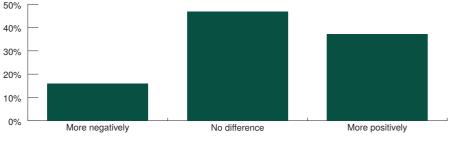


We heard in interviews how lockdown strengthened the closer friendships young people had, but could mean that many of the more casual friendships from school would be lost.

> I remember I became so close with people during lockdown but I also lost a lot of friends. Some friends I called all the time, we would watch movies together. But with other friends who I only really saw in school and because I can't go out and meet them I didn't really communicate with them. So, we've lost our bond."

For those who already had friends, Covid-19 and 50% lockdown could strengthen those relationships, with young people far more likely to say the pandemic had 30% made them felt positive about their friends (37.2%) than to say it had made them feel more negative (15.9%).



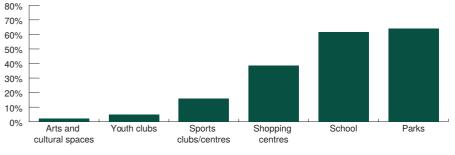


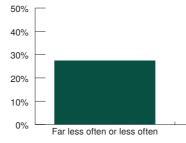
# Keeping in touch and making friends

We asked young people what spaces they hang out in Merton with friends, and found that parks (63.9%), school (61.6%) and each other homes (43.2%) were the most common spaces.

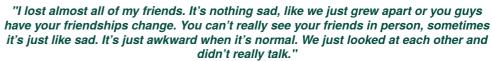
Meanwhile arts and cultural spaces (2.2%) and youth clubs (5.1%) were the least likely to be used.

During Covid-19 and lockdown young people were unable to see their friends and resorted to other means to stay in touch. We found that slightly more young people said that they spoke to their friends more often during this time than less (31.8% to 27.3%), though the most common answer

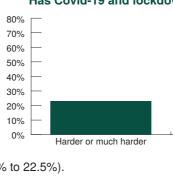




was that (41.9%) there was no difference. However, we found that disabled young people were more likely to say that they spoke to their friends far less because of Covid-19 and lockdown (40.7% to 26.2%).



Almost one in four (23%) young people said that they found it harder or much harder to make friends during Covid-19 and lockdown, though over one in ten (13%) said it was easier and a majority (64%) said that it made no difference. Again we found disabled young people more likely to find it

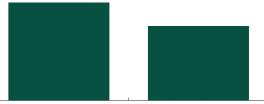


harder to make friends (30.8% to 22.5%).

There was a clear relationship between how often young people spoke to their friends, and their ability to make friends. Those who spoke less to their friends also found it harder to make friends.

### What spaces do you hang out with friends in Merton?

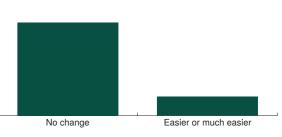
### How did Covid-19 and lockdown change how often you speak to friends?



No change

More often or alot more often

### Has Covid-19 and lockdown impacted on your ability to make friends?



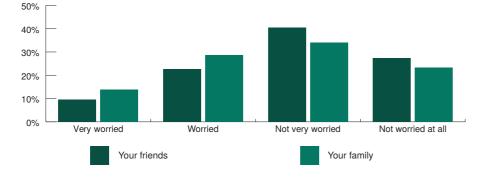


### 34. The impact of Covid-19 on relationships

## Anxiety about family, and support

We found that almost half (42.6%) of the young people we spoke to said that they were either worried or very worried about their family during lockdown, however over half (57.4%) said they did not worry much or at all. While a third (32.2%) of young people said that they were worried or very worried about their friendships during Covid-19 and lockdown

Has Covid-19 and lockdown made you worry about:



The majority (67.8%) said that they were not very worried or not at all worried about their friendships.

In interviews and focus groups we found that the anxiety of Covid-19 and lockdown was usually linked to anxieties and fear about or from parents. Young people would worry about their family members contracting the virus and dying from it, but also their anxiety from Covid-19 would come from parents.

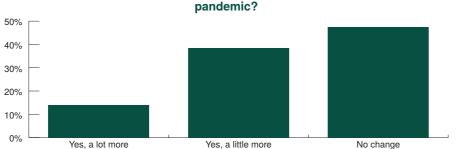
> "My mum has always been superstitious about the tube. She won't sit down on the tube. Now she's more superstitious: don't touch anything, and sanitize your hands."

### Supporting friends and family

Young people worried about their friends and family also found themselves providing more support to them during Covid-19 and lockdown. Over half (52.5%) of young people said they had to provide either a little or a lot more support to friends and family during the pandemic, while less than half (47.5%) said there was no difference.

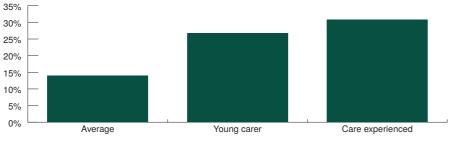
The support provided by young people to their peers was more common with certain groups. For example, young people in care were far more likely (65.4% to 12.1%) than those with no care experience to provide support to their friends and family.

When we asked young people if they felt able to help their friends with their challenges during Covid-19 and lockdown the majority (57.9%) said they did. Only a small minority (13.6%) said they did not feel able to provide help to their friends. Certain groups felt less able to help friends like disabled young people



Have you had to provide more support to your friends and family during the

Answered "Yes, a lot more" to providing more support to friends and family



(42.7%), those with care experience (50%), and young women (64.5%).

"I lost almost all of my friends. It's nothing sad, like we just grew apart or you guys have your friendships change.

You can't really see your friends in person, sometimes it's just like sad. It's just awkward when it's normal. We just looked at each other and didn't really talk."

35. The impact of Covid-19 on relationships





# 3. The impact of Covid-19 on education

## The transition to online learning

One of the biggest impacts of Covid-19 and lockdown was on the young people's education.

We found that a third

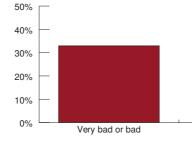
said that they had a

(32.9%) of young people

negative or very negative

experience of learning during Covid-19 and

lockdown. One in four (25.1%) had a positive or



very positive experience. Additionally, young men were more likely to say that they had a bad or very bad (37.9%) experience of education online than young women (25.3%).

In interviews and focus groups, we largely found a more negative experience of online school. Firstly, many found the work far harder than normal online. Some felt that there was more work set during online school than normal. Subjects with a focus on hands on learning, such as Design and Technology, were also far harder to learn online compared to mathematics.

"Some lessons you can tell that they are so irrelevant because they don't have any work to give us because we don't have the resources. I do textiles. And throughout the whole of last year, I haven't stitched a single thing since I started the course. I haven't made a single product using the sewing machine because of Covid you can't touch it, or we don't have stuff at home. So, you can tell that they don't have anything to give us. They're just making it up on the go."

Online learning was particularly challenging for young people with a disability, who found it harder to easily access support from their teachers.

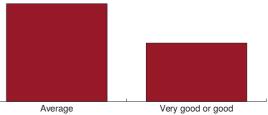
> "My sister, she's got a learning disability. So, it was really, really hard on her because she needs that help in person from a teacher and she couldn't have that when she was back home. And then the teachers would be calling my mum to say that she's not doing this work. And my mum said : she's finding it very hard to do the work because she needs extra help and she's not getting it at home."

Many also felt that support from teachers was far harder to access online, as one to one help or interactions over a desk were replaced with group video platforms which made this hard to impossible. Additionally, many young people missed the support from their classmates in person.

"(I prefer in person learning) because teachers could actually explain – and see where you're going wrong or what you're doing. They can talk to you physically and it's just easier, you can hear them more clearly, understand it more."

Experience of online education was also dependent on young people's living situation, with many young people finding it hard to concentrate at home with additional distractions like pets, entertainment, or having to do work for their family.

### What was your experience of learning during Covid-19 and lockdown?





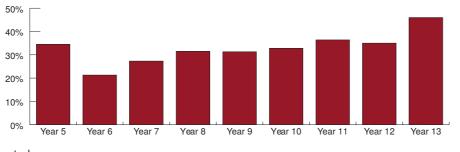
### 37. The impact of Covid-19 on education

## **Online learning at critical moments**

We found that young people were more likely to describe online learning as negative or very negative if they were older, or in transitional stages. Those who had exams, or mocks, or were looking to move onto university or school found online learning harder.

"They were just giving us too much work. Just overloading. I couldn't handle it, I just took my time. I told the teacher that they gave me too much work. I can't do it all at once and they kept on threatening me like, they're the ones that's going to be decided my grade and using it as a threat to rush me and stress me.'

Older groups of young people were slightly more likely to say that they had a bad or very bad experience of education. like Year 13 (46%), Year 12 (35%) Year 11 (36.4%), and Year 10 (32.8%).



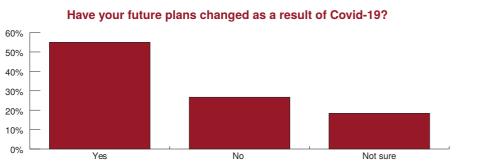
Bad or very bad experience of online learning by school year

This chimes with the experience of many who 0% had mock exams or exams and the learning for them disrupted.

> "I think it also impacts how we feel now even the lockdown has finished because the work that we were set during lockdown, we still get tested on now. So, every time we get tested on this and we get low grades, teachers will put you down a set. We feel really demotivated; our self-esteem goes down."

There was a mixed experience of online education and learning. Young people in transitions (year 11 and year 13) and those who were impacted by changes in exams, were more likely to have a negative experience of education during lockdown.

As a result of the distruption, a majority (55%) of young people said that their plans for the future had changed as result of Covid-19 and lockdown, with only one in four (26.7%) said that their plans had not changed.



"I think it's just extra pressure because we are the year that is probably going to sit the real **GCSEs.** Because after two years, those processes haven't evaluated their teaching assessments.

Are they going to be harder? Are they going to be easier? We don't really know."

"The exam boards haven't exactly told us what's going to happen. Last year, they got things taken off the syllabus. So, are they going to be put back on for us?

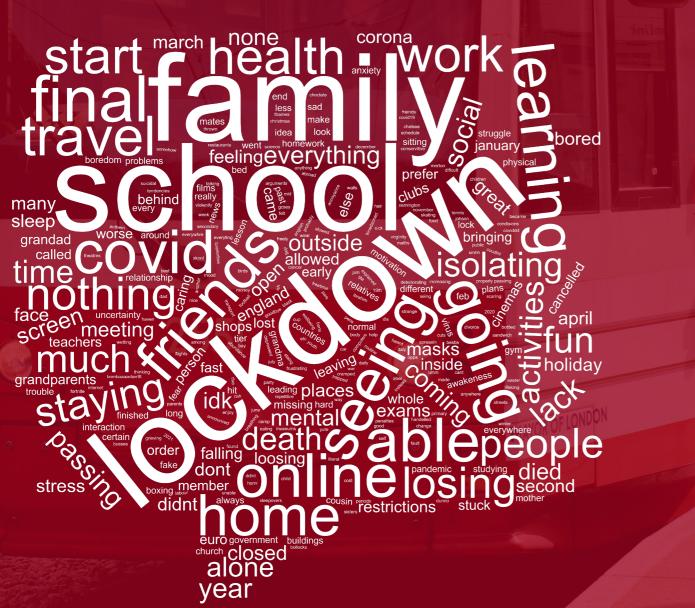
We have to catch up with all the things that we've been doing during lockdown too. So there are a lot of things that have been piled onto us."

39. The impact of Covid-19 on education

## In a word or words, what has been the worst part of the past year?

We asked over 2000 young people what had been the worst part of their past year. There were three key themes in the answers they gave:

- 1. Their education: Young people did not enjoy online school, and many talked about the issues with learning online, falling behind in their studies, and the stress of exam. Those moving from primary to secondary during lockdown also struggled with the transition.
- 2. Not seeing friends and family: Young people largely missed socialising and seeing their friends, and family members who weren't in their household. Seeing friends and family in person is clearly important and something that young people greatly missed.
- 3. Deaths from Covid-19: For a small minority, they lost loved ones as a result of Covid-19 in the past year, like grand parents. This had a huge impact on the young people, and their families during this time.
- 4. Lockdown: Young people spoke about lockdown often, which meant many things, but one clear aspect was the impact of being locked indoors. Many spoke of the bored, isolation, and the impact on not being able to go outside or travel.



not being able to communicate a lot Grieving family, deteriorating mental

seeing my family get sick and knowing my aunt died Not being able to see my friends in person

Not seeing my friend

Online school

I had to see people again which was Not seeing my bestie for a year or so horrible and terrible and made me saad :(

not socialising enough with my friends

online school in my old school

family deaths when i had to do lockdown

everyone buying out everything

not having friends to communicate

The George Floyd incident

not seeing my friends and family

not being able to go out and see people/friends/family

my mental heath, it was impacted a lot by covid.

School

More school work at home

the quality of learning

People died

online school as it was making me less intelligent

moving houses since the council refused to give us property and we have to rent from one estate agent to another

online lessons, I've fallen behind on my education a lot and my grades were sufficient proof of that

Grandma dying of Covid

95% of the past year

Lockdown

Having to wear face masks in school and right now, my problems list has started to fill itself with stuff out of stressed most of the time my control

I was failing my classes, it made me so anxious and my school offered no support

staying at home all the time

Stress and my eating habits

Leaving primary school

Being stuck at home and disruption to education

Being unable to see loved ones

Not being able to travel

Staying at home

online school

going back to school and hearing in 2 years time the grade boundarie for GCSEs will be bigger which is unfair as we have legit missed 2 years of school

Not getting a lot of education See the death rates increasing

Seeing no one else apart from my family in my household

School, it always brings my mood

down thinking about it

Lack of education that gets into our mind due to stress

<u>shock of things retu</u>

Being inside all day

my mental health when i aot covid

when we got put into lockdown

Having to wear a mask also

see my family in my country

losing my grand mother

Losing out on school trips

not going to certain places like

restaurants and local transport and

doctors and hospitals are really busy

also having to celebrate my birthday at home and also not being able to

Not seeing friends and family was a

no boxing clubs or gym open/ gyms

months and they still don't what it

lose have left.Online school wasn'

as good as I wanted it to be.

is. Many friends which I din't want to

Less trips and not seeing friends and

not seeing my friends and family

Not seeing my friends as much

worse internet

not being able to travel having to go back to school

my cousin being hit by a car

Online education

missing out on most of year 10 and missing out on a lot of work in preparation for my GCSEs which i had this year

staying at home, missing out on strength potential in lifting weights and stuff

online school

My grandad died

The start of the year

my grandads death

deaths

schoo

and boxing clubs restricted Not seeing my family and not going School exams outside as often not going shopping or seeing friends missing out on

comina schoo sitting at home all day

strugale

The fact that the government didn't really respond to the COVID spread i have been sick for the past ten at all and let it spread leading to widespread loss of life.

Not seeing friends in person

online learning

losina people i know

England losing euro final

the goverment ignoring us

been mediocre

my grandpa's death

Online school

had to stay home a lot

no social interaction

exams and anxiety

seeing friends.

Doing online church

their hasn't really been a time where

I don't enjoy life for the most part its

going to school, exams and personal

Coming back to school and knowing

there will be more pressure with

relationship with studying/ school

falling behind in school and not

sick

lockdown didnt learn much as i would in school

> falling behind in work and lack of motivation

class mates

staying in school after all the exams Online schoo have finished

Covid-19 and my Dad getting really Not being able to see my grandparents

Spending so much time on a screen and not being allowed to do certain

having a lot of work to do and being things Losing all motivation and not caring

feeling excluded and not getting the about school help i needed from the schools and not going to school/meeting me friends freely

to the same people - isolated feeling

Even though it was great at the beginning to take a break from everything and focus more on yourself, towards the end it really began to hit you just how much you had missed out on. So many things had changed, some just for a little bit and some permanent. And seeing all the statistics, and finding out about friends that had lost relatives t really made you realise how much Covid had affected everyone in a negative way. When you're in your

own little bubble it's easy to block out the world and forget everything Mental health, family relationships, that's happening around you.

> and famil I don't have anything bad to say that I am not sure happened

Not being able to see my friends or family

nina	to	normal
i ili iy	10	nonnai

Missing school my grandad died of covid

breaking my hand

lockdown

work overload from school, them expecting us to work at the same speed alone, and if we don't work fast enough, they demand to see the work

crying a lot and finding out that y so Not seeing family or friends, online called 'friends' have been talking bad about me behind my back.

I'd say that the worst part of the yea is that online elarning had affected my mental health in certain ways but not only that, i feel as if i am a little bit behind in some of my learning however i am slowly catching up and getting better with it

Having to wait until the end of lockdowr

online school

school online and not being abel to go out

england losing in the final on penalties

Not being able to see my friends as much physically

my sleep schedule

not spending christmas with family

not seeing friends or grandparents

Not being able to see our friends daily face-to-face.

online learning

online school

going back to school to early

this wasn't last year it was i think 3 years ago but sadly my grandma passed away and she was like my best friend and i have changed alo since she passed

i feel like i have missed part of my education

no school and not seeing friends or family in Italy

Exams and their stress

online school

Not seeing family and being limited Not being able to take part in regular

probably when another lockdown was announced in January and having to miss sports clubs due to it

first lockdown during April because I lost myself and found it hard to rediscover who I was.

not being able to go to school and not being able to go on school trips and museums and other things.

When Boris Johson was scaring me on the TV with his words saying that it was our fault that Covid was spreading

not being able to be with my friends not being able to travel and visit friends and family

Lockdown

Not being able to do anything

Not being able to see my friends or take part in activities

Online school and lockdowr

my great grandma dying

losing my favorite friends

Online school, I found Maths hard online and i couldn't see my friends.

Change in mental health

school

shops being closed

Decline in mental health

Not being able to do things because of corona

Being stuck at home

Going back to school

mediocre/subpar teaching

school work

Not being able to have much of a goodbye party at my primary schoo

Not seeing friends and no social contact, not having science and physical lesson/subjects normally, lots of buildings like: shops, theatres cinemas closed.

Chelsea winning the champions league

**Online** learning

lockdown

Covid's interruption in my volunteering

The start of the year and spring

being locked in my own house a lot

businesses closing down

the fear and abundance of death

not being able to see firend as much and not going out to do stuff

losing family members

the stress from schools online classes and things not being explained properly leading to confusion and more stress

Having to adhere by school imetable at home

missing out on the full yr10 and yr11 experience

The first 2 months of lockdowns

online school

Missing out on opportunies. Places close

Less time with friends and other family members

uncertainty about exams

family member died

lockdown

Having to do school online

transferring from primary to secondary

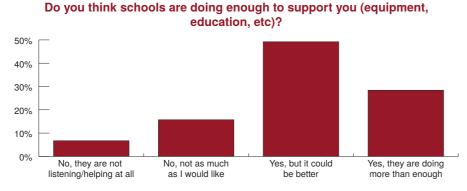
my cat died

## The support from schools during lockdown

We found that for the majority (61.4%) of young people in our survey said that school was all online during Covid-19 and lockdown, with only one in ten (9.4%) still attending school throughout.

If there was one clear positive of online learning, it was that some younger people enjoyed not having to go into school in person. The other key positive from young people about this period of online learning was the way in which schools attempting to support them with their learning remotely. Many schools during this time provided additional support to students, such as providing them with laptops to work.

We found that a good majority (77.6%) of young people said that school was doing enough to support them, and we heard from many about the laptops they had been provided to support their learning.



For many having to learn away from school presented many predictable issues around

digital access such as unreliable Wi-Fi, having to share computers with siblings, or programmes not working how they were supposed to.

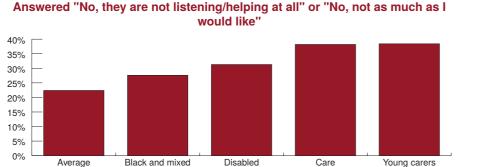
> "A lot of people could also couldn't get online as well. Some people I know only have one computer between their family and her sister was working. She couldn't work at the same time as her sister. So she'd say: Oh, I can't attend this lesson right now because my sister is using the computer. I don't know about you, but I would have to be in my room because my mom would be working downstairs. My sister would working downstairs. So there was not one set space where I can work."

One in five (22.4%) said that school was not doing as much to support them as they would like, or not helping or listening at all.

ethnicity

young people

Certain groups especially felt that their schools were not helping them enough, such as young carers (38.4%). Black and Mixed ethncity young people were also far more likely to feel unsupported (26.3% and 28.9%), compared to White and Asian young people (19.7% and 20.2%).



young people

experienced

"Some people like slacked off over lockdown. They weren't doing as much work. But now we have to make up for all that time.

I don't really know. I feel like I have to reevaluate everything that I thought I wanted to do.

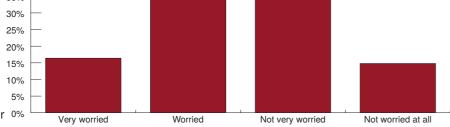
What if something big, like a pandemic happens again? How do I approach it now? How do I approach my life now?"

43. The impact of Covid-19 on education

## Anxiety about their educational future

Young people did not just have a mixed experience of 35% online education but were divided on how much thev worried about their education 25% during Covid-19 and lockdown.

During Covid-19 and lockdown, did you worry about your education?



Around half (50.9%) told us that they were either very worried, or worried about their 0% education during Covid-19

and lockdown, and the other half (49.1%) being not very worried or not worried at all. This was largely divided across all groups.

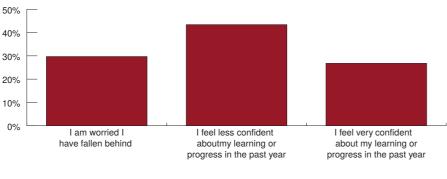
> "The first lockdown was just so sudden, we didn't really have work to do, we were kind of relaxed. The weather was nice, it was warmer. When we came to the second lockdown, we had work to do. We realized that: Oh, wait, we've missed like tons of work. Oh, no. Let's get back to work. And it was a lot. We started doing live online lessons."

In interviews we found that young people were less divided in feeling more worried about their education, especially as they have returned to in-person learning. Many young people who enjoyed online learning and not going into school felt taken back with how much they had missed, and how much they needed to catch up on when they got back.

"It was quite a struggle when we came back to school because all teachers expected and relied on us knowing new things that we supposedly did during lockdown, but we didn't know."

We found a majority (73.1%) said that they were worried about falling behind or less confident about their learning because of Covid-19 and lockdown. Only one in four (26.8%) said that they felt very confident about their learning and progress. As a result, many young people we spoke to interviews and focus groups felt anxious about falling behind and their education.

How have you felt about your learning and education in the past year during Covid-19 and lockdown?



"It was really hard to engage with the teacher and ask questions, because even though we're often in the same class, it's harder to like to turn on your mic and speak because it sounds different or whatever. We'd come back and feel like we've missed a lot of the content."

## Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and **Disabilities (SEND)**

We spoke to young people with special educational needs and disabilities about how Covid-19 and lockdown had impacted on their lives. We conducted three interviews with young people from M.A.G.I.C youth project, and a focus group of four young people at Perseid Upper school, all aged between 12 and 22.

### **General impact**

We found that SEND young people seemed to be less concerned about the wider risks about Covid-19, but far more concerned about the lockdown and the impact it had on their lives and daily routines. We heard about the dislike of changes like social distancing or online learning, and the boredom that came from activities being cancelled. This had an impact on SEND young people's wellbeing, with the teachers and youth workers supporting them receiving a range of messages from parents about their child being anxious or stressed at home. However, although SEND young people were not particularly concerned about Covid-19, many of them had underlying health conditions, which was worrying for their support networks.

"Some of them have underlying health conditions, so you have to be careful."

### Online school and lockdown

Unlike most of the survey participants, the SEND young people we spoke to did not express feeling anxious or being worried about Covid-19. The biggest impact from Covid-19 was lockdown and being forced to stay indoors and missing school, and the social element that came with that. We heard how online learning could be very challenging, with technical issues with technology, but it was the lack of in-person support from their teachers, friends, or youth workers that had the biggest impact. We heard though that the majority of SEND young people easily transitioned back into school and seemed to proceed their classes and activities as like before lockdown.

Outside of education, many SEND young people expressed mixed feelings about lockdown at home, with some enjoying it and others finding it hard to stay indoors. We heard how many SEND young people spent their time playing video games, watching movies and TV, and being with family members, however many were more limited in their ability to do activities especially when having a parent or caregiver with special needs.

> "Some young people don't have access to things and some of their parents can't fully move. The things they can do are very limited."

### Large impact on support networks

SEND young people did not explicitly speak about the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown on their mental health, but those who support them like teachers and social workers highlighted a clear impact to their support networks. The families, caregivers, teachers, and social workers who make up SEND young people's support network were disrupted during Covid-19.

For example, the support for the complex needs of some SEND young people that would have been provided at school and special services were shifted to family homes, which could be particularly impactful for those living in small and/or cramped conditions. The shift from in-person services to online also presented additional challenges, such as working out how to use platforms like Zoom, or Microsoft Teams.



### 45. The impact of Covid-19 on education

# 4. Safety in Merton and the police

## Young people have a mixed experience of safety

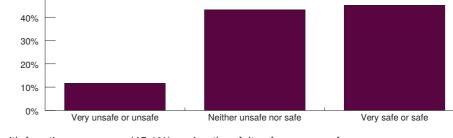
Young people in Merton feel uncertain about their safety in the borough, with many being acutely aware of safety issues like knife crime and gangs but not personally feeling unsafe.

Almost half (43.3%) said

that they feel neither safe nor unsafe. Only one in

ten (11.6%) said that they

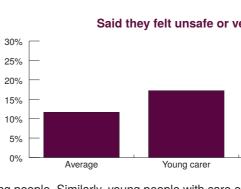
50%



felt unsafe or very unsafe, with four times as many (45.1%) saying they felt safe or very safe.

"I feel like if you live outside of Merton, you're safer. If you come from outside of Merton, no one really knows who you are, nobody knows, so nobody cares, you can do what you're doing. I feel like when you live in Merton, then you create a name for yourself or you're known or whatever."

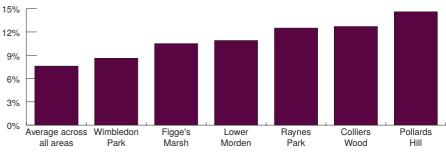
Safety was experienced differently across Merton, with some groups feeling more unsafe than others. Young men were more likely than young women (12.5% to 9.3%) to feel unsafe. One in four (25.6%) disabled young people said that they felt unsafe or very unsafe, compared to one in ten



(10.5%) for non-disabled young people. Similarly, young people with care experience were twice as likely to feel unsafe compared to those with no experience of care (23.2% to 11.6%). This is interesting as many young people are aware of crime and safety as an issue in London, but only a minority in the survey told us that they felt unsafe.

We also found that young people in Merton have certain perceptions about different areas of the borough, with certain areas like Colliers Wood and Pollards Hill being seen as more unsafe. However, half (55.5%) of the young people we asked said that they felt unsafe in none of the areas of Merton.





"I think knife crime is everywhere but still there's like... Mitcham, obviously they created a name for it over the years, I think it's kind of died down now but it's still there. You have like Wimbledon but they're all silent, but everyone knows what is going on in them places as well, so it's just like Merton is safe but only if you just don't do anything stupid."

### How safe do you feel in Merton?

### Said they felt unsafe or very unsafe in Merton





Disabled young people

### Areas of Merton where young people were most likely to feel unsafe in

## Staying safe during Covid-19 and lockdown

Young people in Merton also had to contend with the impact of Covid-19 on their feelings of safety, whether it was catching and spreading the virus or the increased amount of time they spent online.

50% 40% 30% 20% 10% 0%

Not very worrie

How worried has Covid-19 and lockdown made you feel about staying safe?

One in five (20.3%) said that they felt worried or very worried about staying

safe in Merton during Covid-19 and lockdown, compared to four out of five (79.7%) who said they were not very worried or not worried at all.

Certain groups again were more likely to be very worried or worried, like those with care experience (23.7%), disabled young people (26.9%), young carers (31.3%), and younger children in year 5 and year 6 (31.5% and 29.1%).

### Staying safe from Covid

We heard in interviews and focus groups that feeling worried about staying safe from Covid-19 was often from young people who were at risk or had family members who were shielding.

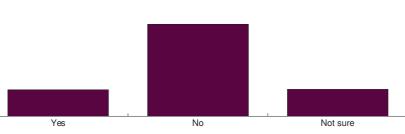
> "My Grandma died during lockdown, before that I wasn't really afraid or certain of what was going on with Covid but I just felt kind of scared and frightened."

Young people were less concerned about getting Covid-19 themselves, as they had heard the experiences of peers who were okay, or they had it already and it wasn't serious.

> "I got covid, I was really happy. I couldn't taste and smell, I could eat everything, even vegetables because I couldn't taste it anyway."

We found that one in five (18.2%) said that they felt anxious or worried about going outside because of Covid-19, though a majority (63.2%) said they did not. While one in five (18.5%) were not sure. Similar to previous questions around safety, certain groups





were more likely to feel anxious like young women (22.4%) and younger children in Year 5 and Year 6 (31% and 20.8%)

> "Yeah, after lockdown, if I saw someone wipe their nose but not clean their hands, I'd get annoyed. Especially now, I can't help it, like wash your hands. That annoys me so much, like allow it man, wash your hands bruv. Oh jeez, I'm not trying to get Covid."

"Yeah, after lockdown, if I saw someone wipe their nose but not clean their hands, I'd get annoyed.

Especially now, I can't help it, like wash your hands. That annoys me so much, like allow it man, wash your hands bruv.

Oh jeez, I'm not trying to get Covid."

70%

60%

50%

40%

30%

20%

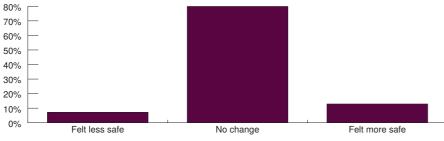
10%

## Safety online during lockdown

As we have seen previously, young people in Merton were spending a lot more time during lockdown on screens and online.

We found that for most people (79.9%) said that there was no difference to how safe they felt online during lockdown. In fact, slightly more young people





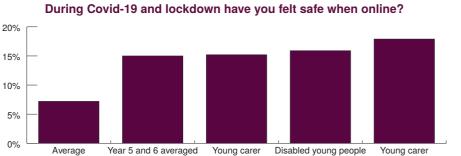
felt a lot safer online during lockdown (12.9%) than less safe (7.2%).

"I think Covid-19 could of made people more vulnerable to different things online. Because we were spending more time online and spending more time on social media and stuff. As a 14-15 year old hearing all the stuff that's happening to people is really disheartening and really hard."

Young people we spoke to generally did not think much about online safety and felt generally safe or savvy about their own personal use of the internet. When thinking about safety and online use, young people were far more likely to have a negative mental health impact of social media than being a target or victim of crime.

> "Because we've been on social media so much, people want to try new things, because they now have the time to do it. They'll try new things but they won't really consider the safety of it. So that also makes them much more vulnerable to everything."

There were some key differences in feelings of online safety across different groups again. Young people with care experience were three times as likely to feel less safe online compared to those with no care experience (17.9% to 6%).



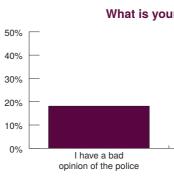
Disabled young people

were over twice as likely to feel less safe online during lockdown (15.9% to 6.5%) and were the only group that more people felt less safe than safer during this time online. Young people in Year 5 and Year 6 were far more likely to say that they felt less safe online during Covid-19 and lockdown than average (17.4% and 10.7% respectively).

## Young people have a mixed experience of the police

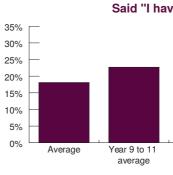
While young people generally feel safe in Merton, they were far more divided in their opinions of the police, especially between different groups of young people depending on their experience with the police.

We found that overall. almost twice as many young people had a positive view of the police than a negative one. Over a third (34.1%) of young people had a good opinion of the police, compared to just less than one in five (18.1%) who had a bad opinion of them.

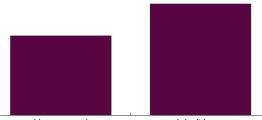


However, the majority of younger groups like those in year 5 (55.2%), and young women (54.8%).

There were only three groups where a higher proportion had a bad opinion of the police than a good one: young Black and Mixed ethnicity young people (32.9% and 25.4%), those with care experience (33.9%), young carers (31.3%), and disabled young people (26.8%).



### What is your overall opinion of the police?



I have a good opinion of the police I don't know

young people (47.8%) said that they did know know what they thought of the police. This was especially true for

### Said "I have a bad opinion of the police"









experienced

Disabled young people

Young carer Black young people

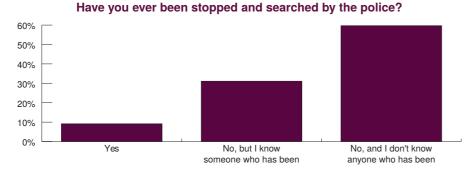


## Stop and search

One key issue around trust in the police is the police of Stop and Search, which we found was relatively known about in Merton if not

personally experienced.

Less than one in ten (9.2%) said that they had been stopped and searched by the police, while one in three (31.1%) said that they had not been stopped and searched but knew someone who had been.



The majority (59.7%) had

not been stopped and searched and did not know anyone who had been. However, we found that different groups were far more likely to have been stopped and searched or knew of someone who has been.

> "I don't really like the police, the police pulled someone over and everyone got out the cars and we started videoing it. People say they're helping us but how are they helping us? Some people were filming the police so if like they did anything wrong they'll be on video. It's just a bit sad that people have to film the police to make sure they don't do anything wrong."

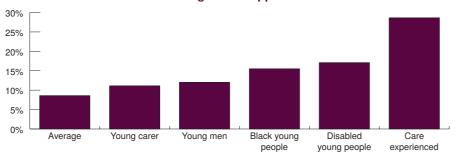
For Black and Mixed ethnicity young people in interviews there was a clear distrust with the police and their presence in the community. During Covid-19 and lockdown there were highlight visible news stories around Black Lives Matter or the murder of Sarah Everard which likely had an impact on the perceptions of young people about the police.

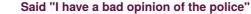
Black young people in particular were three times more likely to be stopped and searched than White young people (15.5% to 5.6%), but disabled young people and care experienced young people were the most likely to be stopped and searched by the police.

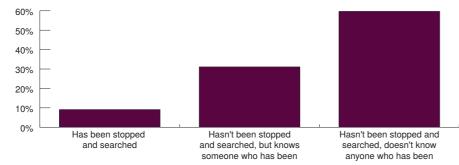
Those who had been

stopped and searched

Said "Yes" to having been stopped and searched







were five times more likely to have a bad opinion of the police than those who had not and knew nobody who had been (53.1% to 10.2%). Those who knew someone who had been stopped and searched were twice as likely as those who did not to have a bad opinion of the police (24.2% to 10.2%).

### Young Offenders in Merton

Five individual interviews were conducted with young people aged 16, 17 and 18 at the end of their order with Merton Youth Offending Services, covering topics of the impact of Covid-19 and its lockdown on health, relationships, education, future aspirations, and on living and socialising in Merton.

In general, young people serving their time did not experience the same impact as others from Covid-19, especially those who had already experienced a form of lockdown previously in prison. Moreover, all young offenders stated that they did not experience any worries, anxiety, or unsafety because of Covid-19. On the other hand, similar to most survey participants, they spoke about being bored, becoming lazy, and the lack of alternative activities

### Mental health and seeking support

Most of the young people we spoke to told us how they relied on themselves when in need of support for their mental health. This was because, for many of them, there was a perception that others were not able to help or wouldn't want to help or wouldn't be as effective as self-help.

### "If you're worried about something, who you would you go to?"

## everyone is going to stick around."

We found that young people with experience of the justice system were less likely to seek help from their friends and family, and less likely to have that support available to them as a result of this lack of belief that others would want to support them, or that external support is effective.

### **Authorities and Police**

Young people with experience of the justice system had a real mixed view of policing and the authorities, that ranged from clearly negative to apprehension. One young person experienced being stopped and restrained which left them with a fractured bone, which gave them a strong distrust of the police.

### "You never know, you get stopped for a dumb reason. Yesterday, the officer was struggling to tell me why I had been stopped."

However, others spoke about the reform and change of the police system that they wanted to see. There was a clear anxiety about police behaviour, and the worry and fear that they felt from being stopped and searched for doing nothing wrong. There was a lack of belief that they would be able to go about their day unimpeded even if they have done nothing wrong.

## Respect works both ways."

This lack of understanding of the reasons why they have been stopped and searched felt interpreted as simply a lack of respect by the police of them. Many interviewees mentioned the need for a two-way street of respect when being approached by the police.

Interestingly though, the young people we spoke to have a clear distinction between the youth offending service and the police. While many initially felt that the Youth Offending Services was a punishment, the majority said that they now see it as a service trying to help them, for example helping them with getting into employment.

"At first I saw it as a punishment, but now I see it as people trying to help me."

"No one. Because I got myself ... You should have the skills of independence as not

"If an officer doesn't show me respect, why do I have to show them respect? Yeah.



# 6. Space, Place, and **Our Merton**

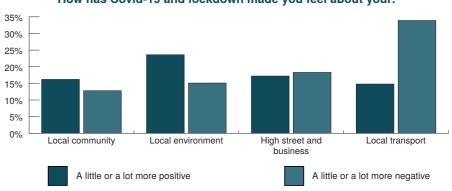
Covid-19 and lockdown meant that young people across Merton spent far more time in their local area, and many came to feel more positive about it as a result.

Across a range of spaces, most young people said that Covid-19 and lockdown made no difference to how they feel about their local environment (61.3%), local high street and businesses (64.3%), local community (71.9%), and local transport (52.5%).

However, if we only look at those for who Covid-19 and lockdown did impact how they feel, we can see how different spaces were impacted.

Firstly, more young people

felt that Covid-19 had a positive impact than a negative impact on how they feel about their local community (16.2% to 12.8%) and their local environment (23.6% to 15.1%).



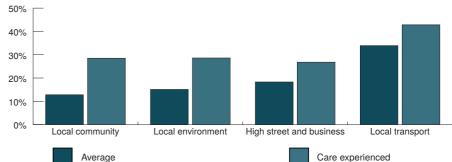
While more young people felt that Covid-19 had a negative impact on how they feel about their high street and businesses

(18.3% to 17.2%) and local transport (33.9% to 14.8%).

This reflects what we found in our interviews and focus groups, as many young people used the Covid-19 and lockdown period to explore that their local environment and community, like green spaces or parks. While young people felt generally less positive about shops and on transport because of the number of people and anxiety about being safe during Covid-19.

Only one group were particularly negatively impacted by Covid-19 in the way they felt about local spaces: care experienced young people. They were more likely to say that they felt a little or a lot more negative across all spaces.





### How has Covid-19 and lockdown made you feel about your:

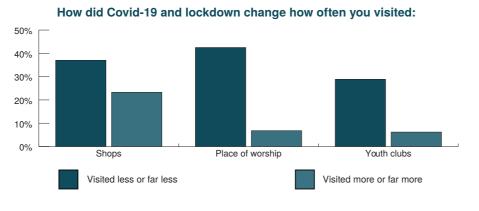
### Feels a little or alot more negative as a result of Covid-19 towards:



### 55. Space, Place, and Our Merton

## Visiting spaces during Covid-19 and lockdown

We found that commonly Covid-19 and lockdown did not have a huge impact on how often young people visited certain spaces. Young people told us there was no difference in how often they visited youth clubs (64.9%), places of worship (50.6%), and shops (39.8%). However, this is likely reflecting that many young people did not visit places of worship or youth



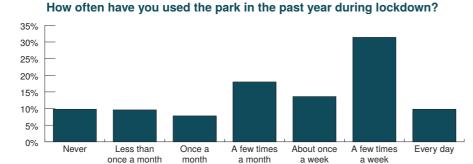
clubs anyway, so Covid-19 and lockdown had very little impact

If we look at those that Covid-19 and lockdown did impact on, we find that overall young people visited places of worship (43.3%), youth clubs (29.7%), and shops (37.9%) less often. However, with shops one in four (23.1%) ended up visiting them more often.

> "I would change a lot of things. I would only let three people at a time in the shop. I'm not shaming people. I would tell a massive group of people to get out because that's too many people in one shop."

### Parks and green spaces

Parks and use of green spaces were the exception, with many young people telling us that parks and green spaces where important to them and their mental health during Covid-19 and lockdown. Two out of five (41.2%) young people told us that they used the park either everyday or a few times a week during



lockdown, and a majority (72.8%) using parks at least a few times a month. Less than a third (27.2%) used parks once a month or less, however one in ten (9.8%) said that they never used the park.

> "When we were allowed to like see one person and go to the park. I really took advantage of that as well. Especially because in Merton, there's a lot of greenery."

Park use differed by ethnicity too, with White young people being the most likely to use the park every day or a few times a day (48.5%) and least likely to use the park less than once a month or never (13.6%). While Black young people were the most likely to use the park less than once a month or never (30.5%) and the least likely to use the park everyday or a few times a day (27.6%).

"I would change a lot of things. I would only let three people at a time in the shop.

I'm not shaming people. I would tell a massive group of people to get out because that's too many people in one shop."

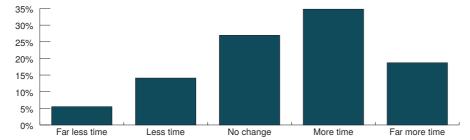
57. Space, Place, and Our Merton



## Free time and volunteering

The majority (53.5%) said that they had more time or far more time for activities and hobbies during Covid-19, with one in five (19.6%) saying they had less time or far less time. Those with care experience were far more likely to say they had less time or far less time (39.3%), as were young carers (27.2%).

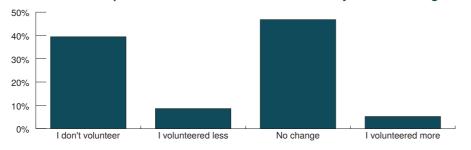




Boredom was one of the key challenges for young people during lockdown, as many had more time to look at learning additional skills. This mainly pertained to activities and hobbies that could be done inside.

Volunteering was one way that some young people used their additional free time during Covid-19 and lockdown. However, only one in twenty (5.2%) said they volunteered more, with far more either volunteering less because of lockdown (8.6%) or not volunteering at all generally (39.4%).

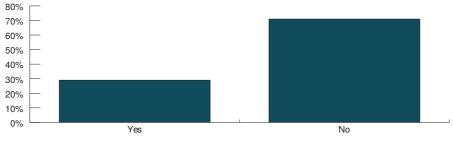
What has the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown been on you volunteering?



"So, before the pandemic I volunteered as an instructor... I would teach disadvantaged young children But obviously, you couldn't do that with Covid-19. So I missed having that interaction with young people in my life."

A majority (71%) of young people said that they did not know where to find volunteering opportunities in Merton, with only one in three (29%) saying that they knew. Young people were less likely to know the younger they were, and young women were more likely to know than young men (37.6% to 22.4%).

Do you know where to find volunteering opportunities in Merton?



"I would have more community services. Volunteering and stuff. At least advertise them even more. I know there's a lot around, but especially on people they don't know, people don't know about it."

## Young people feel excluded from decision making

Young residents feel excluded, and not listened to, when it comes to decisions that impact them locally. Their perception that their voice does not matter also means that they're less likely to want to get involved, whether that's having a say, or volunteering.

We asked young people how much of a say they had in how projects and activities are designed for young people.

Almost half (44.2%) thought that they had no say at all, with a further third (31.7%) saying they had little say.

50%

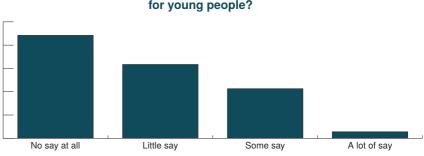
40%

30%

20%

10%

0%



Only one in five (21.3%)

thought that they had some say in project and activity design, and a tiny minority (2.8%) thought that they had a lot of say. This was reflected in interviews with many young people feeling like their voice did not matter to those who make decisions.

"I just don't trust them (Merton Council)."

We also asked how involved they think young people in the borough are in the planning of youth projects in Merton. Again a majority felt that they were either not involved at all or not very involved (72.7%), compared to a

minority who felt that they were involved (27.2%).

50%

40%

30%

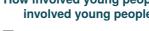
20%

10%

0%

asked how involved young people want to be in the future direction of the borough with a smaller majority (64.5%) wanting to not be involved at all, or not be very involved.

Interestingly, we also



Not involved at all

There was also more apathy and pessimism about the voice of young people mattering from

How involved do you think young residents are in the planning of youth projects in Merton?

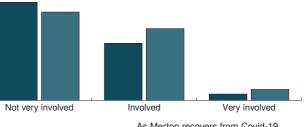
groups more likely to be traditionally marginalised. For example, Black, Asian, and Mixed ethnicity young people were far more likely to feel like they have no say. Care experienced young people and young carers were less likely to feel like they have a say and less likely to want a say in the future as a result.

We found that the less say a young person thought they had in how activites are planned or the less involved they thought young people were in decision making, the less likely they were to say that they wanted to be involved.

Part of the challenge is that young people are less likely to distinguish between their local authority, regional, and central government, especially in the context of Covid-19 and lockdown. Questions about how they felt about Merton as a local council would sometimes lead to responses about Boris Johnson, or Central Government's approach to the pandemic. In many cases the apathy young people felt towards the overall political situation impacted how they felt about local decision making.

### How much of a say do you have in how projects and activities are designed for young people?

### How involved young people think they are in decision making vs how involved young people want to be involved in decision making



As Merton recovers from Covid-19 and lockdown, how involved would you like to be in the future direction of the borough?



## 59. Space, Place, and Our Merton

# What next?

## **Going forward as Young Inspectors**

Our responsibility as Young Inspectors working with the London Borough of Merton is to ensure that our voices and views are represented within decision-making throughout the Council.

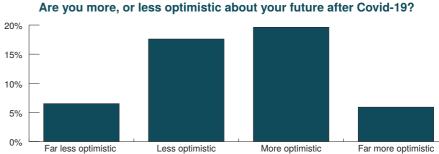
Having spoken and worked with you all over the last few months, we have a clear vision as to what it is young people need from us, and Merton Council going forward. As young people, we faced unique challenges as we rapidly transitioned from a hyperconnected world to one marked by physical isolation, loneliness, and a host of unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic.

It is clear that one of our key asks is to have a seat at the decision-makers' table. It is clear that we want more recognition of the issues directly pertaining to us, for example adequate and functioning mental health services. We want to be able to see our friends, continue thriving in our academic pathways, and achieve the dreams and aspirations we want.

It is also clear that the Covid-19 lockdowns affected our access to education, be it from Primary school level all the way through to University; this is something we as a generation feel very strongly about. We need our teachers, professors, and lecturers to be supported in delivering the education we deserve in the current contexts we face.

Our generation feels strongly about our local area and environment. We want to take care of our spaces and we want recognition that we deserve to thrive in healthy, safe communities. We need a working relationship with the police and local services, and we need to know that our social backgrounds will not be a determining factor in how likely we are to be stopped and searched. We need to be able to trust the people tasked with ensuring community safety, and furthermore we want to have a community that we are proud of.

We found that many young people feel less optimistic about their future after Covid-19. Many of the challenges they faced existed before the pandemic, and some have just gotten worse because of it.



This is why we, as

Young Inspectors in Merton, will be ensuring that the recommendations established by young people living and learning in our local Borough will be pushed as far as possible. We have been trusted with your time, your views, and your aspirations and it is our duty to ensure that these are carried as far as we can possibly take them.

Halima Mehmood Young Inspector, and Peer Researcher



### 61. What next?

## Credits and thanks

We want to thank all the young people who took part in this research and either did our survey or took time to speak to the Merton Young Inpsectors in either interviews or focus groups.

### Young Inspectors (Merton Council)

**Design of survey** Lurdes De Jesus Moreno

Toby Podger-Taylor Anna Huk

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### Young people taking part in interviews and focus groups from:

Beau Fadahunsi (Merton Connected)

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With special thanks to Hannah Green Toby Podger-Taylor Recruiting participants

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Partnership for Young London: Sharon Long, Matthew Walsham, Iris Bos

### Research and Film making team:

Film production team Filmanthropy

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Interviewers and script writing: Halima Mehmood Denise Vidal-Candengue

### Coordination and execution research project

Sharon Long Matthew Walsham Iris Bos Lisa Jones Denise Vidal-Candengue Halima Mehmood Lola Kareem

62. Credits and thanks



### 63. Credits and thanks

