

# COVID-19 Lockdown: an Emsworth teenager's perspective

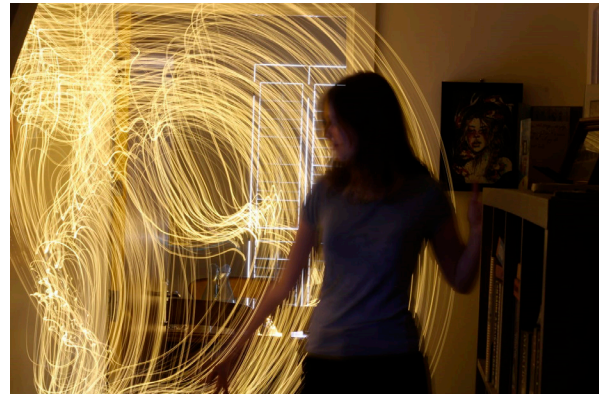
by Maya Lilley

As the Trust's youngest member, I've been asked to write about my experience of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, you should know that I'm a fairly introverted person and do not represent all teenagers my age. Many of my friends have had a different experience of lockdown and the consequences of it have affected people in unique ways. I may not be a *typical* teenager, but I am 15, so here's my perspective of lockdown in early 2020.

Before I tell you about how my life has been affected by the lockdown, I want to say that I know these are first-world issues. I am extremely fortunate to live in a comfortable home, with enough food and technology to enable me to connect with friends and family, and healthcare if I need it. I am grateful for all these things.

I'm sure that many students have secretly hoped the school would burn down, or some catastrophe would get in the way of sitting exams, so this may seem like a dream come true for some. However, I was personally looking forward to the GCSE experience as it was finally the time to showcase the immense amount of time and effort that had gone into revision and preparation. I had worked so hard to study, sit the mock exams, and prepare for the great download of information which had been sucked up like a sponge for the previous two years. It should have been a great relief to get out of sitting exams, but in reality it was deflating.

In March, we were given only two days' notice that school was going to close due to COVID-19 and we would not be able to sit our GCSEs. The last day on 20th March 2020 was thrust upon us so quickly and we were left with very little time to say goodbye to people that we might never see again. Rather than the big, ceremonial conclusion we were promised, there was a more anticlimactic fizzle-out to our secondary school years.



*Painting with light using a toy light sabre*

With the leavers' assembly, prom and other events cancelled or postponed, we were faced with six long months of nothing.

Students in other year levels have been set work to continue with at home, but for GCSE students, there's little point in studying for exams that will never happen. I started the first week of lockdown with a colour-coded schedule, studying subjects that I plan to take next year in college. It was difficult to self-motivate study and after a few weeks, I managed to convince myself that baking brownies was a form of English (reading the recipe) and biology (consuming said brownie).

Over the last 12 weeks, I've learned a bit of Mandarin, read loads of books and dabbled with photography. I've watched Simon Reeve documentaries and *Race Across the World*, envying their world travels and learning a little about the world too.

I sometimes worry that my brain has shrunk from its lack of exercise. It's like the feeling of coming back from summer holiday and temporarily losing the ability to subtract, but on a bigger scale. However after a few weeks in college, I've been assured that my brain will stretch itself out again.

As a previously prolific artist, I have found my inspiration dwindle like the stock levels of loo roll at Tesco. In recent weeks I have

decided to take a break. Again, I hope that the inspiration will return when I'm back in school art class. I have started photography and am specialising in light painting. Painting with light is the process of leaving the shutter open for up to 30 seconds and creating shapes, patterns and illuminating objects with torches or fairy lights to create incredibly unique images. I am still a beginner in this, but experimenting with my mum and younger brother was a fun and exciting experience so I look forward to practicing more with it.

I have a small group of friends that I didn't talk to regularly for a couple of months but stayed in touch with over WhatsApp. After eight weeks or so we were allowed to meet up in the park while staying at least two metres apart (socially distancing). This was a huge improvement to our way of life in lockdown and made me feel more connected with the outside. The highlight of my social life during lockdown was making a new friend at the beach (two metres away) who I otherwise would not have spoken to. Both 15, and stuck at home, there's something to talk about.

Some families have found the 24/7 time at home together has been bonding, some a struggle, or a mixture of both. I have the challenge that perhaps about a third of teenagers have, where I have two homes. My parents are divorced and live ten miles apart. Under lockdown rules, children with two homes are allowed to travel between homes and normally I would spend a week at each house during the school holidays. However, my dad lives with his mother who is elderly and vulnerable. So going back and forth from my mum's house to my dad's would pose a risk to her. So I've stayed four weeks at each house and self-isolated on return to my dad's. It's been hard to be away from one parent at a time for so long. Each day, I talk to the other parent on WhatsApp, and feel fortunate to have the technology where I can see and hear them.

When we were only allowed an hour of exercise a day, I took up running using the

Couch to 5k programme. In my whole life I could never run for more than a minute and used excuses like 'I don't have the physique of a runner', 'I'm too tall', and 'Running and I don't get along'. But I bit the bullet and started the programme, and I'm loving it. I'm currently on week eight of the nine-week programme and can run for 28 minutes without stopping. My mum does it too and we send sweaty-faced pictures at the end of the each run as evidence and encouragement. We have been fortunate with the weather during lockdown, with May being the sunniest ever and when I'm at my dad's in West Wittering, I enjoy going to the beach.

I know that COVID-19 has had dramatic effects across the world and has caused tragedy for many families so I feel fortunate that the worst things that have happened to me are missing friends and family, missing the end of school and having to find ways to fill my time. Positive things have happened too. I've become fitter, I've had more time and feel closer to my family, my room is very tidy and I have come to appreciate my fortunate circumstances. I will take all of these things with me when life goes back to normal.

