

A Young Person's Experience of COVID 19

I think it is safe to say the year 2020 will not be forgotten. We experienced first-hand the world on lockdown. As a sociable young person in lockdown, unable to leave my house or see friends, it was a difficult adjustment, but it was not completely negative. I never thought that as a fifth-year student leaving school at 4pm on the 12th of March 2020, that I would not be returning to school but instead would be continuing my learning from home for at least the rest of the year.

The first time I heard the word 'Corona Virus' was my Mam telling my Auntie on the phone about a news article she read about the 'Corona Virus' in China in early January 2020, 'Sure, it's in China it will never make it here'. No one really spoke about the virus as no one thought it was that serious and that it wouldn't spread I remember in the two weeks prior to the lockdown, I started bringing sanitiser and anti-bacterial wipes to school and some of my friends saying it was 'over dramatic'. Little did we know, that with the added factor of modern air travel, within a short amount of time, the first case of the deadly virus would become present in our local area the week the schools shut, and we would be staying at home and begin online learning for the following 11 weeks.

Learning from home was something alien to me. I had never really done schoolwork online before. Luckily, our school had adapted a new online learning program called Schoolwise in September, and we were set up just in time for the lockdown. In the week before the lockdown as the corona virus began to spread rapidly across Europe, all of our teachers made contingency plans for in the event of school closures and taught us how to properly use Schoolwise. It took a while to get used to it but soon enough we were getting schoolwork done and trying to prepare for our exams.

The first week of lockdown was plain sailing. It did not seem so bad. I got into a routine and everything was going well. I am a very productive person as it is, I can't sit still for long I like to find things to do and keep busy. I would get up in the morning, go for a run out the quiet back road behind my house, come home, get ready for the day and get on with schoolwork. My Dad also began working from home, so we were all at home for the long haul except my mum who is an essential worker in the circumstances. Everyone being at home all the time definitely gave me a greater gratitude for having alone time, and quiet in the house as everyone was constantly on calls and it was difficult to get a moments peace. However, it was really nice to bond with my family too. Although I was missing my friends, I loved my routine and thought it would only be for two weeks. I preferred this routine over going to school in the beginning but then, it was announced that the lockdown had only begun, and many restrictions were put in place and being enforced from the 27th of March. Hearing this set a lot of young people back as many events started being cancelled and our Easter break was being spent at home, a lot of optimism was lost. Soon enough, something just changed in me as well, and I started staying up late, not bothering with schoolwork as it was

becoming repetitive revision in most cases and I lost my motivation. I found that a lot of my friends were in the same position. No one cared anymore and it was just about getting through it and staying as positive as we could.

Technology was definitely a key factor in my sanity throughout the ordeal. Even my typical activities done outside of school, moved online such as my singing lessons and Comhairle meetings. Without my phone, it would have been even more difficult to get through the lockdown. I used Facetime and Snapchat to communicate constantly with my friends. My screen time (amount of time on my phone) was even up at 12+ hours a day. With the lifting of restrictions date being constantly delayed, it was becoming clear that it was getting more difficult for everyone to cope. Everyone was becoming even more brought down by this and the light at the end of the tunnel was getting further and further away.

It also became even more difficult to communicate with friends as we had nothing to talk about, so we were calling and texting each other less and less as the weeks went on. Given the situation, plus added factors of things going on in my own life, I think I was coping well with the support of my family and friends. I think the hardest thing for me to grasp was that many of my friends were not coping as well and I couldn't go for a coffee and a chat like we normally would. We all had to stay at home for our own safety. I felt really bad, but I did my best to help them out and they were there for me when I was struggling too. We were all in it together.

I began finding new ways to keep busy like at home photoshoots in my back garden or taking pictures on my walks as the weather was spectacular, virtual shopping with friends on facetime and planning days out for when lockdown was over, group 'Zoom' calls with a quiz and every Friday evening all of my neighbors would go into their gardens and do a road quiz via WhatsApp. I got the opportunity to attend some online networking events with Comhairle and participate in a video too which I was able to share with my extended family online. We found ways to do things together while staying apart. I managed to find new things to do all the time which made sure I was never sitting idle or bored. The restrictions have brought a new sense of sincere gratitude into my life.

Having been in social isolation since the beginning of March, when it was announced that there was a phased plan being implemented to ease the restrictions, a great sense of joy and relief knowing that the end of the lockdown is coming was brought among everyone.

I've started to see the things that are actually important to me and I've started to realize my own values as a person. I have a greater gratitude for the little things in life like talking to people face to face every day and giving my friends and family a hug.

Although our lives will be very different after this lockdown for our own safety, I think my own personal outlooks on life have changed for the better because of it.