



Refugee Week 2021

My Life and Learning in Lockdown 16-18yrs

My life and learning in lockdown' Covid-19 Lockdown and School Restarts – Impact on Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health

Thursday 17th June at 6.30-8.00pm

Red Cross, Barnardo's and Extern collaborated to facilitate engagement of young refugees ages 16-18 years to participate in a session with NIA Engagement and Chair of Education Committee, Chris Lyttle MLA via zoom on 17 June 2021.

In preparation for the event, Red Cross engaged with young people from Somalia, Syria and Sudan who arrived through family reunification in NI

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-reunion-instruction>

Barnardo's and Extern engaged with Syrian young people who arrived through Refugee Resettlement -Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) in NI

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/syrian-vulnerable-persons-relocation-scheme>

Young people from Somalia, Sudan and Syria arriving through refugee family reunion or resettlement with various degrees of interrupted education and experience of formal education or English language were invited to attend pre-engagement meetings. Parents and young people initially engaged to outline the process, review questions and increase confidence of understanding of content with exploration of responses. Participants' experience of education- school or FE colleges were varied with some young people yet, unable to access appropriate education.

Young people were divided into three breakout rooms according to language with interpreter provided.

Participants welcomed the Chair of Education Committee joining breakout rooms to hear lived experiences of young people directly and contribute to discussion.



Responses form breakout rooms:

Group 1:

The Hardest thing about Lockdown?

- Not going out
- Football
- Casual meetings-just meeting up with friends
- Stuck at home- boring
- No education-arrived as part of family reunification in Dec 2020-unable to get a school place or college place
- New to NI-nowhere to go, familiarise myself with Belfast or area. No sightseeing
- Learning online- really hard as no English language and no language support (interpreters). Did not understand the online classes
- Trying to find a school place-register with BMC

What did you miss?

- Going to school -my education
- Chance to make new friends
- Teachers

Benefits in Lockdown?

- Sleeping all day-not doing much
- Learning new games
- No benefits- it was useless-nothing to do, everything was closed

Plans for after?

- Education- want to be educated to get ahead in NI
- Improve my English-try to learn as much as I can
- Go on holiday to London, visit family



- If no education- try to look for work but this is linked to English so I don't think I will be able to find work

Did you have support during lockdown? Where did it come from?

- No one helped me- I had to help myself and be positive in my mind
- Red Cross helped to fill forms for me
- BMC helped to look for different courses for me- but still not started
- Red Cross helped me with practical support- tablet/phone to access education
- Mother helped me

Did your school or the Government support your health & well being?

- No, it was so stressful, I thought about returning to my country where I had friends and
- No, just telephone calls from college but not face to face meeting so I didn't feel supported or understood
- My family -mother and my elder sister was main support

If there were lockdowns in the future what could they do to support you?

- Let younger ones go out and keep older ones at home
- Do not restrict us going to school-access to education
- No online education- too difficult if you do not speak English
- If there was online learning- need devices, good internet connections and language support
- Extra support for non English speakers to learn the language
- Pastoral care- mentoring- feel supported 'keep an eye on me'-like a teacher who will see you every day and check in with you.

What could the school or government do to support you – in lockdown, or in the future

- Practical support-devices, internet connections
- Language support to understand classes
- Additional intense ESOL to help bridge the gap to access BMC





- School places for 16-18 year olds to have full support and be ready for FE or jobs- able to attain GCSE or equivalent

Having been through lockdown what are you now most grateful for?

- Being alive- not affected by covid or anyone in my family
- Bonding with family-after years of separation
- Mental health was ok (1 x participant)

Group 2:

Difficulties and what did you miss the most

- Isolation
- The home is too small to fit us all, there is no room to study.
- Difficult to share bedroom with siblings – both needing to study
- Sports
- Youth club
- social life
- Friends at school
- Difficulties working online as didn't have the necessary or up to date devices
- Bored
- Miss learning in classroom environment
- Too noisy at home
- No self-discipline to mirror school

Benefits

- More sleep ins
- Change of routine
- No benefits – spent most our time sleeping and eating which had a negative impact on my health
- No benefits – was bored doing nothing
- I switch off my camera during online learning to sleep and not engage
- More time for yourself
- Family time
- No benefits – it was stressful, isolated, no friends. We learn better together. Home too packed

Emotional support

- Thinking and worried about GCSE results and planning what to do next year
- Didn't receive help studying online, missed my teachers – feeling negative
- Stressed – over thinking about the uncertain future
- Stressed, anxious, worried about school, news of the pandemic, no support from government or school
- It's hard to express feelings online to school
- Impacted my studying as learn better when its face to face
- I was worried about GCSE – didn't talk to anyone. I have others to talk to but felt teachers didn't reach out. Yes, I know how to reach her
- Stress, worry especially when at home I push myself to learn independently.
- Felt lost and missed face to face support from my teacher
- Stressed, angry – poor internet connection meant it was difficult to talk to teacher
- Not enough devices at home which stressed us more

Who helped

- 6 said parents helped
- 3 said teachers helped
- 4 stated that teachers took too long to reply 2 – 3 days but expected work to be handed in on time
- 1 received support youth workers/sport coaches

School support with Mental health

- 2 agreed
- 6 didn't receive any support

What can government do to improve

- Syrians need help as they have language barriers
- Better devices with chat and mike facilities
- Assign more work
- Better/extra support



- More support on all subjects

School/government support emotional well being

- Schools to respond quicker
- Extra support/help with school work not just assign work – teachers sending lots of work but not answering queries. Example before I returned to school I asked a question and didn't receive proper explanation, the same question appeared on the exam and I struggled. There was no help or extra explanation to do the work
- No printers at home. Have to go to school for print outs and that clashed with submission date which meant we submitted it too late

Grateful

- Not for grateful for anything, things got worse for me, I was putting on weight as I didn't exercise as much
- Happy now that the restrictions have eased

Group 3:

Hardest thing- what did you miss?

- Everything just went online straight away, it was all so sudden
- We had 1 laptop for the whole family which was hard – we had to use our phones for video's for example and it was so hard
- One male who arrived 2 weeks before lockdown said he didn't miss anyone because he hadn't met any new friends yet
- Boredom
- Social life
- There was too much going on at home to be able to concentrate on work
- Missed being able to really learn
- My work was on google and I needed to get everything translated before I could even start because I didn't understand
- I had too much spare time
- I had two weeks of school and then I missed the whole year



What were the benefits?

- Got to know family more and spend more time with them
- One female advised she was used to very long commutes to school and it was good that she no longer had to do that
- Had more time to play computer games
- Others didn't advise of any benefits

Who provided support during lockdown?

- Group of female friends who all studied online together
- Friends
- Family
- No- one asked me how I was or how I was getting on in school and felt as if no one really cared
-

How did school or government support with your wellbeing?

- The government didn't help me
- They could have helped by not stopping classes
- I really wanted face to face and that wasn't possible
- Zoom video calls did really help though – better than nothing
- At least having some school helped us to know what was going on
- Sometimes I had 1 language class a day and then 3 x subject classes which were 1.5 hours each

What were you grateful for?

- Lockdown made me want to study more because I appreciated being back at school
- Now I want to go to college after school
- Now I want to join new courses and make friends
- Time with family
- I'm glad that we are now out of lockdown and I can see people



Other discussions

- There isn't enough language support in school
- We went back to school for one week and then got a test that we weren't prepared for – we were told that it would determine where we went for college but we only get our results in August and so it seems pointless
- There was no support during tests to help us understand more
- Because there isn't enough language support it delays how long it will take for me to get into university and this is really frustrating – I don't want to spend 5/6 years doing ESOL in college
- If we were accepted faster it would all take less time.
- Frustration at being offered college place only rather than school placement

