COVID LIVING

Funded by Wellcome Mental Health programme, and part of Mindscapes, Wellcome’s international cultural programme about mental health

Produced by Flying Object with Jack Arbuthnott

With the help of 77 young people around the world and Wellcome’s network of partners
Summary

Spring 2020 and the world in lockdown. It's an extraordinary time for young people, who find themselves away from university, school or work, and spending an intense amount of time with family, housemates or completely alone. But across the world young people are engaging in new activities and hobbies, and actively thinking about how to manage their mental health through this period.

This provided a unique opportunity to capture different experiences young people are having, and try to understand how they cope during a time of potential high-anxiety and low mood. But more than that, we also saw this is a time to learn from. When life returns to normal, the question of how we manage our mental health will still exist, and this lockdown period could surface all kinds of ideas, tips and practices that can help people in the future.

In this unusual time, we trialled unusual ways of inviting young people to share things with us. Could we make WhatsApp a way to capture someone’s day? Or use Zoom to get an insight into the real experience of what people are doing? We wanted to learn how different methods and activities could “unlock” different insights, and to make taking part in this project an activity or creative act in itself, rather than a simple surveying exercise. We iterated these methods of collecting stories as the project developed.

With contributors drawn from Wellcome’s global networks, participants from 17 countries took part, and shared a wide variety of practices and activities they discovered had helped during this difficult time. While every experience was individual, we saw certain trends and commonalities in the approaches taken. We also observed the extent to which the practices used mapped against Wellcome’s “Active Ingredients” framework.

The final collected material will form the basis for a cultural / creative project to be developed with young people later this year, and is intended to stimulate further discussion around mental health, and the active ingredients.
Goals

Collection and research

- Build a bank of stories and experiences from 14-24 year olds around the world, that collectively paint a picture of what this time was like, and the individual approaches to managing mental health during this time.

- Develop an understanding and insight into any trends or commonalities found between participants.

- Map experiences against the Wellcome “Active Ingredients” framework.

- Identify learnings which are emerging that can be taken forward into the post-Covid 19 world.

Experiment with collection methods

- To experiment with and test different ways of capturing lived experience, that could be utilised in future projects.

Cultural Output (Phase 2)

- To use the material collected to create a cultural / creative “output” that can be used to stimulate further discussion with a wider audience.
Capture methods
Approach

Our 14-24 year old participants were living through a novel life experience, in a reorganised media environment. Acknowledging this, the project was designed to quickly pilot a series of different ways of capturing material that can flex as the crisis unfolds, and respond to the needs of the project as it develops.

Rather than banking on one approach to capturing people's lived experience, we initially explored a variety of creative approaches, including online video, questionnaires, audio, photography, written documentation, text messaging and interactive solutions. We piloted a number of methods, and pushed forward with the formats which elicited the most interesting responses.

Throughout lockdown, WhatsApp and Zoom became the primary means for young people to communicate with their friends. We wanted our participants' responses to be authentic and natural so we opted to use these platforms too, tapping into the trends around technology which were already a part of their lockdown experience.

By using existing technologies rather than developing bespoke solutions, we were able to quickly iterate how we capture experiences. In doing so, we aimed to further our understanding of how individual experiences of mental health can best be recorded, with the potential to replicate these in future Wellcome projects.
Different participatory activities

We initially tested four different ways to participate, that would appeal to different personalities, and yield very different contributions.

The aim of these methods is to be fun for the person taking part, different from other call-outs going on at the time, and to give us useful material to plan the next stage of the project.

The four methods

- WhatsApp: “Chat with Jade”
- Video conference: “Can we join you?”
- Text: “Dear me?”
- Photography: “5 Photos”

The detailed “scripts” and process for each of these activities can be viewed here.
Chat with Jade

As young people find themselves socially isolated from friends, WhatsApp - already a hugely significant method of digital communication - has taken on an even more important role in how people talk about, share moments from, and reflect during this period.

We used WhatsApp ourselves as a way to authentically tap into people’s lives, and give them an opportunity to share their experience in a way that feels truly authentic, and of-the-moment we’re living in.

Over the course of the week the participant will create a “digital collage” of how they are coping through lockdown, by responding to prompts and provocations they are sent over WhatsApp from Jade. Replying through a whole range of media, including video, picture, voice, text, at the end of the week we / they will have built up a rounded sense of how they are approaching this time, and the activities they are doing.
Can We Join You?

Young people have been taking up new hobbies, activities and practices to help them cope.

But rather than just hearing they've been baking, walking, crafting or dancing, we want to understand the specifics of what they've been doing and let them share in depth of what this experience means to them.

We wanted to get a deep and specific understanding of a person, and how a particular activity or practice they are using is helping them cope during this time. To do this, we attempted to create a kind of “remote documentary”, spending an hour with someone in their space, but talking to them via Zoom as they go about an activity or practice.
Dear Me

A goal of this project is to ensure what is learnt during the lockdown isn’t lost in the future.

This exercise asks participants to engage with this idea directly, and consider their future selves the audience for a writing exercise.

By thinking about what can be taken from the lockdown experience into the future, we hope participants will reflect on what they’ve gained, and what could be useful to them even once the crisis has ended.

---

Dear Me

I’m writing to you from June 2020.

During the Coronavirus crisis I have spent my time to read books. That is because I’m going to graduate school this year. One of my professors tells me that I have a talent for something. But at the same time, he’s not sure if I’m going to be successful because there’s a huge difference between having talent and lacking talent. My research has not been very concrete at the moment. That’s the situation, so the primary thing to do is to use my time to advance my research. So reading papers and taking notes becomes a central part of my life. That’s something that wouldn’t have changed with or without Covid-19. Rather, thanks to Covid-19, I’ve been able to go out less, and I’ve been able to spend more time on what I really need to do.

Some things I have found really helpful have been …

Helpful for what? Covid-19 itself was very helpful in getting my life in order. Life is easier when I just don’t have to move. Covid-19 is a great way to avoid being swamped with unnecessary events. Covid-19 taught me the importance of isolation and hikikomori. I basically spend my time reading books in my room now. Every once in a while, when I need to get outside, I take my dog for a walk in the neighborhood park.
5 Photos

Central to so many young people’s experiences of this time has been taking up creative pursuits, or using making things as a way to manage.

We want to give a participant the chance to do something creative, and produce a collection of photos that express their experience of this time. While we’ll naturally get less context and detail, we were interested if a purely visual exercise might yield things that would be missed in a conversation or written task.
Call out and participants
Responses to the callout: 140
Completed Questionnaire: 77
Chat with Jade: 15
Can We Join You: 17
Dear Me: 17
Peer to Peer: 1
Total complete: 50
Due to the speed at which the project was delivered, we focused on accessing young people through existing networks and groups associated with Wellcome, including Into the Light Indonesia, Science Gallery international network (London, Melbourne, Bengaluru), University of Copenhagen, Quicksand, Kenyan Medical Research Institute, Wellcome Collection RawMinds youth group, Museum of the City of NY, CSMVS Museum Mumbai, Kenyan Medical Research Institute, and Hong Kong University. The callout was also spread informally between friends via WhatsApp groups.

This process allowed us to quickly build a group of young people to take part from around the world. However, while the intention was never to create a statistically significant representative sample, the process did have some further limitations:

- Participants were self-selecting, and came via groups or networks with a pre-existing interest in either mental health or cultural activities. This means we may have received a skewed picture, based on people with high cultural capital, or who are already invested in “positive mental health”.

- While the focus was on pushing the call out via a wide variety of networks with different members in different countries, we weren’t able to proactively correct for underrepresented groups of characteristics within the set of participants.
Sample contributions
"S", India, #107
25, Female

I am doing a few things like:
1. Cooking - It requires me to focus on what I'm making so my mind doesn't wander in different directions and good food makes me happy as well
2. I'm trying not to constantly be glued to the updates about the cases and the situation. Just gathering what is happening around me to be updated.
3. I'm trying to work but that is a bit of a struggle. Everything I had planned for myself didn't work. I was suppose to do 1 artwork/illustration/poster a day but the whole situation made it difficult.
4. I'm trying to get my sleep cycle into place. I'm consciously trying to exhaust myself so that I sleep on time but sleeping on time has become a problem.

Some things that are happening and I have no control over are:
1. Self Introspection - Late nights lead to a lot of self introspections. So recently almost had a anxiety attack thinking about what is happening around me and my relations with people around me. Another night I was crying but was happy after the introspection because I felt nice that I'm able to spend the time with my family which I wouldn't have ever got because I stay away from my family now.

"When I indulge in art, my mind and my thoughts are focused on creating what I have to make. My mind doesn't wander to different places. Specifically to the things that make me anxious"

Ya. There are days when I don't feel like doing anything. I procrastinate work and then end up doing it all night. And for food I just have the regular food that my mom cooks for everyone.
“A”, Hong Kong, #120, 23, Male

“All I can tell myself is my hands are tied, the usual ways, the usual solutions that I chose in the past are now so-called prohibited. I couldn’t do them. I had to look for new ways out so I tried building models and sometimes meditation but the effectiveness of them were not as good as the solutions I [used to] choose...”

“I think I’ve grown... and as I said it’s very satisfying [making models] I get more patient, with.. I get more patient in general I would say. I originally would say I get more patient with building models but I think in general I get more patient because as you see it is very labour intensive, it requires a lot of work, a lot of details and when it comes to airbrushing you have to wait... so this is a good part of it [lockdown].”

“I would say that I’m very consciously aware of these problems [mental health] but it’s just that the hands are quite tied and all I can do is try my best. But God gives you lemons you just make lemonade”
“D”, India, #109, 24, Female

“I feel like, in general, I could feel my productivity levels going low...it was bothering me a lot because I felt I wasn’t doing enough...because I wasn’t doing my best I felt guilty about that. When the lockdown started there was a whole lot of pressure, especially on social media to be productive... and the only thing I was doing was binge watching series...and I’ve been consciously thinking about how I can be less critical about myself with that and just remind myself that we’re going through a pandemic.”

“I think the fact I’m quarantined with a person I’m very close to helps so you don’t just spend the day with your own thoughts... and I’ve been consciously trying to take out an hour or two [between WFH] to just do something I wanna do which would be going for a run... or even just sitting in my room doing nothing really but listening to music...”
“I”, Indonesia, #106, 24, Male

Hmmm I’ve been dealing with the lockdown here in Indo for around 2 and a half months!

my best is... when I finally bought a nintendo switch to accompany me to live inside the house like forever

*before the price was up 😂😂

the worst... maybe when I feel the tension of working from home...

the inability to meet my friends too... video calls weren’t enough tho.

You
I’m aware it must be quite late where you are now so last question for today. This is a silly one: can you sum up your lockdown experience using only GIFs or

Irwan (106)

this one means that I got lost of time and days 😳😢😢

You
Have you been trying to exercise regularly in lockdown? Well done for doing it after that pizza, that move is a tough one!
yess... hahaha 😃😃 im doing it regularly but not pressing it too much

just do it when i feel like i want to

maybe... 3 times a week for around 20 mins

😅😅 it’s not really enough to burn all the calories tho but i just enjoy the sweating process

also im trying to read a book to enlighten my brainnn too hahaha
“I”, India, #111, 23, Female

I find that learning some kind of art where I am using my hands and learning something new by doing it myself really helps me forget things and clear my head. So crochet has been a great activity to go back to for that.

I guess one more thing is that I have also learned to accept that I don’t have to fix everyone’s problems (and there are too many of those in my house). This is a trait that I think my mom has perfected and that my therapist pointed out to me last year which has really stuck with me. But more on that when we talk about the bad parts lol

Theres also one more thing I do that I forgot to mention: I’ve been cooking and watching a LOT of Bon Appetit test kitchen videos. I think those videos are actually what make me the happiest

View from the balcony

And finally, we saw clear blue skies! Delhi’s air quality is one of the worst in the world, and with everything coming to a halt the pollution decreased as well

You

If you were going to suggest doing one of your daily positive activities to a friend (e.g. like crocheting a globe for world environment day (!) or painting or taking time in an outside space to

I would actually suggest the mindfulness activity because it is very accessible and can be really customised to personal interests. I would tell them to do something that allows them to get into a “flow” (which is actually a concept in occupational therapy). Basically something that is simple enough that you will pursue it but also challenging enough to get you to engage with the activity. Such crafts are often repetitive, and have been very therapeutic to me because while I am doing something like that, the thoughts in my head take a pause. So my mind just calms down and is fully engaged in that activity alone, rather than other times when multiple thoughts are running through my head and causing fear or panic or just disgruntlement. I would push them to find whatever it is they like doing, and do it just for the sake of doing it and nothing else.
“N”, UK, #108, 18, Male

You
Yeah I can imagine it can be hard to stay focused. Is there anything you've started doing since lockdown that you've found helps you stay motivated when you're not really feeling it?

Listening to music is really helpful to me or even sometimes just putting work down for a bit when I get overwhelmed or frustrated

You
Do you ever chat to your friends about your new knitting skills or more generally about like, mental health or general wellbeing while in lockdown at all?

In general I don’t talk to people that consistently and I have different levels of comfort with different people so with some I’ll talk freely about mental health and stuff and some I don’t really mention it. Even with my knitting and activities I tell different people different amounts
Assessing and iterating the participation methods
Advantages + disadvantages of the collection methods

Can I Join You? (Zoom)
+ Deepest insight into the person - a 1hr Zoom gave the research team the greatest sense of getting to know the participant, and understanding where they were coming from.
+ The process of talking to them while they do the activity created a different dynamic, and when worked best, allowed the conversation to feel less like an interview.
+ Enabled us to really get into the specifics of a particular activity, and understand the importance of it to the participants mental health.

- However certain activities, especially highly physical ones or ones that take place outside, make it hard to carry out.
- Labour intensive. Takes a long time to organise, carry out, process and watch.

Chat With Jade (WhatsApp)
+ Very natural format for the participant, and when worked best they seem to feel able to be open, honest and expressive
+ Allows for follow-up questions, and being responsive
+ Having the conversation play out over three days allowed the researcher to build a connection and relationship with the participant. With some people a relationship was built, and the participant felt more able to share and open up as the week went on.
+ Gives the participant different things to do: creative exercises, questions, video and voice, which builds up a picture of who they are (though not as a deep as that from CIJY)

- Having it play out over three days can take a lot of time - however, does give the participant a lot of flexibility in how they interact.
- Material received is of mixed quality, with some inherent limitations in the format.
Advantages + disadvantages of the methods

Dear Me

+ By far easiest to administrate, so could build scale more easily
+ Very easy to read back, and report on
+ At best, puts the participant in a reflective mood, and creates quite deep and considered answers

- Not all participants follow the instructions or prompts.
- Not able to follow up - thought: can we make this a two part exercise?
- Can be a struggle for those for whom English is a second language (we have offered voice record as an alternative)

As the project developed, Dear Me was iterated to be more directive. While the initial instructions allowed for a more free flowing response, by adding in specific questions the contributor should address, we were able to get a more useful insight to the specific things they were trying.

5 Photos

+ A fun, creative activity for the participant to do.
+ A very natural way to share their lives - one they are probably doing already via social media.

- Very shallow insight into some of our key interests
- Unable to follow-up for more detail, or to tease out specificities

5 Photos discontinued as a separate activity following the pilot, and integrated into the WhatsApp conversations.
Additional method added: Peer-to-peer

As the project developed, we added a new method of capturing stories, inviting a participant who had taken part in a Zoom conversation, to invite a peer of theirs to do the same, and then carry out the activity themselves.

The intention behind this was to:

- Test whether this would let us scale this activity, and capture more video footage than our team would be able to itself.
- Create a network effect, and get more people to take part in the project.
- Understand if a “peer to peer” conversation led to the deeper or more honest conversation.
Peer-to-peer: example conversation

“G”, Paris, #143, Female, 22
“S”, Hong Kong, #176, Female, 24

G: What were the times you didn’t enjoy being at home?

S: Hmm *sometimes you want to have some refreshing moments outdoors*, say going to swim or practicing yoga in an open space. It was not possible during the lockdown and sometimes I had always wanted to go outside for a walk... just downstairs or near the park or somewhere else...

This string of conversation actually fits with one of the ingredients: “Better urban access to green spaces”. Throughout the study we found people that had limited access to outdoor spaces during lockdown missed being able to spend time outside, even people that would call themselves “homebodies”, showing there’s definitely a link between mental wellbeing and ability to move around in nature.
S: Yes I think so, because my graduation thesis is on mental wellbeing and I have to conduct sessions with local young Hong Kongers and most of them are not anxious. They enjoyed lockdown. They can have much me time, enjoying themselves, baking at home...

I'm conscious about maintaining my own mental wellbeing... we conduct a group meditation on [video chat software]. I do individual and group meditations [to help manage my mental wellbeing]

“S” seems very aware of “self”. Consciously undertaking “self-care” practices despite being an introvert and engaging in group activities online in order to manage their mental health while contact with others is restricted...

G: Have you had to take manage your mental wellbeing?
G: “I also meditate... I sometimes find it very hard to relax because it feels like my brain is always springing around and there is always so many stuff spinning around inside my brain. Do you have any tips? Or how do you help yourself to get rid of these things that are in your brain and running fast?”

S: I don’t get rid of these things. Relaxation to me is a non-judging process, so a non-judging process is I’m not putting effort to do anything at all. I don’t try to relax, I don’t endeavour to do anything. I don’t endeavour to get rid of chaotic mind. I just let thoughts come in, emotions come in and they go in and out. Noticing they go in and out, and noticing these thoughts is relaxing. I just know, it’s just my intuition.

G: “What do you mean by compare?”

S: Compare is, say you feel that the person sitting next to you is more relaxed than you, ‘Yoshi is more able to focus on her breath or his breath than you.’ This is comparison. But meditation isn’t this and yoga it doesn’t require you to do so although, sometimes well I do, I do compare and I try not to. Because when you compare you can’t focus.

S: It’s all about concentration on the movement or each position the body is in. The similarity between yoga and meditation is: Focus on self. Focus on evil. They all talk about full concentration on self, not others. In meditation we don’t compare, even if it’s in a group meditation. You don’t compare with the one sitting next to you or the one right opposite you on screen.

G: “You talked about there are some similarities between yoga and meditation? Can you briefly explain what you do during yoga?”
G: "What made you start meditation?"

S: Misery, uncertainty and anxiety. It's not anxiety over covid-19 but covid definitely had some impact on it. I mean under covid 19 how am I going to manage my graduation job? How am I going to write my graduation thesis and conduct interviews and do work is overwhelming... so meditation is maybe one way out.

G: "So did it really help you overcome this overwhelming feeling?"

S: "I don't think I would say overcome but I just let them be, or let them go or let them in."
Active Ingredients
Mapping against the Active Ingredients

During the period of collecting stories / experiences, Wellcome shared with us the first iteration of their “Active Ingredients” framework, which focused on identifying the 26 different ‘ingredients’ that really make a difference in preventing or tackling youth anxiety or depression worldwide. These active ingredients exist within and beyond current treatments provided by professionals.

This enabled us to begin observing the prevalence of specific ingredients in the experiences young people were sharing with us.
#113, Orange NSW
22, F

“I’m grateful for technology...the connections I’ve made near and far are so important to me and keep me feeling positive in a time like this. The value of connection is a big thing for me, like I can withdraw at times [laughs] I’m really good at that. So, being able to see people is something that I need to remember is really important.”

Ingredients identified
- Increasing engagement with positive activities
- Increased self-compassion
- Better urban access to green space
- Engagement with theatre and the arts
- Increasingly doing small / pleasurable things

#111, New Delhi
22, F

“I also started an Instagram page just to document all my artistic ventures haha! It’s mostly for myself, because I thought I should make a practice of documenting all these experiences!”

Ingredients identified
- Increasing engagement with positive activities
- Engagement with theatre and the arts
- Increased self-compassion
- Increasingly doing small / pleasurable things
- Increased sense of mattering
#112, Gurugram, 24, F

"I think I've been very thankful that I have worked throughout the day. It just keeps my mind occupied...In India we've been in lockdown for almost three months now and I think I'd have driven myself insane if I were just watching TV and lying on my bed..."

Ingredients identified

- Learning to be more hopeful
- Engagement with theatre and the arts
- Better able to shift perspectives
- Better stress response via relaxation
- Increasing engagement with positive activities
- More bodily movement

#109, Goa, 24, F

"I think the fact I'm quarantined with a person I'm very close to helps so you don't just spend the day with your own thoughts...and I've been consciously trying to take out an hour or two [between WFH] to just do something I wanna do which would be going for a run...or even just sitting in my room doing nothing really but listening to music..."

Ingredients identified

- Increased sense of mattering
- Increased self-compassion
- Increased social connectedness
- Engagement with theatre and the arts
Dear me,

"On the plus side, this has been a time of realisation. I don't think there has ever been a time when I have realised so much. I have learnt a lot about my family, about food and how it is cooked, about my colleagues, about how I perceive my friends, and about myself. I would not say that this means that I have changed how I perceive these aspects, rather I feel that more has been revealed."

---

Dear me,

"My health reflected my lack of effort in taking care of myself. Things had to change. I thought of activities that could actually benefit me: exercising, meditating, drawing, studying, and journaling. And that is exactly what I did. Every morning and night I followed ab workouts and cardio routines while also meditating on the app "Headspace". I colored in my coloring book as a peaceful activity and I often journaled my thoughts in the app "Reflectly". I also followed Just Dance youtube videos for fun. With all of these changes, not only was I able to lose five pounds, but I started to feel at peace with myself despite the chaos in the world. All of these activities served as an escape from reality and it finally made me feel like I was doing something productive in quarantine."
"Our student government has been holding virtual talent shows, creating videos thanking our healthcare workers, hosting weekly virtual spirit days and more recently, spreading resources for the BLM movement. Last week was pet week, so people submitted pictures of their pets and we emailed them all to the student body and shared them on social media. They were all so cute! :) I think I am more motivated because we are all less connected and I want to restore some of the spirit we usually have in school!"
#152, South Yogyakarta
17, F

“Me and my friends kinda got [a group chat] together and divided our work, so I would do one thing and they’d do the rest and then we’d collect our answers together...”

#135, Krahule
21, M

“In London I was running a consciousness reading group... and this group sort of survived [lockdown] but not in the form of consciousness reading group, we formed just a group where we talk every fortnight... And we just talk about how we are, tell some jokes. It’s kind of funny because they’re all from different parts of the world...”

Ingredients identified

- Improved social relationships
- Better sleep and body clocks

Ingredients identified

- Reduced repetitive negative thinking
- Better urban access to green space
- Improved social relationships
- Better able to shift perspectives
Observations & reflections
Observations & reflections

The primary aim of this project was to collect stories and testimony from young people during this time, rather than perform in-depth analysis or come to firm conclusions.

However, as we spoke to more people through the lockdown months, it became clear that there were certain trends and patterns.

It was particularly notable that these were found throughout the world, as if the lockdown “experience” had created more common ground between different cultures.
Rather than lockdown purely being a cause of anxiety, it has also been a period through which some young people have identified stresses they felt in “normal times”, and have considered changes they might want to make.

‘A’, UK, #132
22, Female

“What have I learnt about myself? I learned that I was rushing everywhere. I was studying. And doing two jobs. But when I had to stop everything it was kind of a shock. I realised I can stop. You can spend a day at home. I’ve learnt that I was rushing a lot everywhere. And that I wasn’t as healthy as I thought. Because I was stressed...”

‘C’, UK, #123
23, Female

“When life goes back to normal, the fast pace will come back. It’s then easy to get wrapped up into it. When I took myself out of London, I felt so much more relaxed. I’d like to take that with me. You don’t always have to be rushing and stuff. It’s something I’d like to remember. I think it’s very hard to say... yeah I’ll do it, it will take a lot actually do it”

‘I’, Indonesia, #106
24, Male

VOICE NOTE: “I am feeling pretty good after 3 months lockdown. ... I have been working out. I am very blessed for all this time ... I feel much better going through my routine, and the moments I spend with my family. For the future me, I need to be strong and persistent”
Skills and hobbies allow participants to immerse themselves mentally, and at best, create a sense of purpose, and a sense of control.

“I”, India #111
23, Female

“I also recently (end of last year) started to learn how to knit and crochet. I had some leftover yarn lying around so I began teaching myself crochet through YouTube and really got into it.”

“Building models. It gets me concentrated onto one thing ... it’s like watching a drama or soap opera, you are going through something with the characters, you like the journey, it’s not just about the ending. It’s the same for building models. During the process you also enjoy, but at the grand finale, you’re like, I’ve come all the way”

“I’ve been gardening... One of the most rewarding things is having something you can eat at the end of it. Lettuce and tomatoes grow really quickly!”

“I like to do something really detailed. It helps me focus. But you can think about other things”

“A”, Hong Kong, #120
23, Male

“Dear Me... I bought you a journal diary. The only thing I have written on it so far is “Invest in yourself”. I hope you make this a habit, your way of life even past COVID 19. All these things I am doing like running, learning to cook and reading is not just because I am bored. I want us to find purpose, have fun and learn on contentment.”

‘C’, UK, #123
23, Female

‘S’, India, #107
25, Female

Adding to the things I’m doing is also painting and drawing to calm myself. Painting patterns just lets me be around colours which do make me happy.
Young people are connecting with different people than they might usually, such as their family or neighbours. Unable to get face-to-face contact, the value and limitations of using technology to stay in touch has been magnified. Forced alone time has given people a newly discovered (or rediscovered) value for personal connection.

“W”, Australia, #113 22, Female

“I chat to friends, and they’re having a bad day. You cheer them up, and feel like you’re being helpful. I’ve been making friends some cards. That gives me a lot of energy to be able to help others.”

“One value connection of connection is a big thing for me. I can withdraw at times, so (being) with people is something that I need to remember as something important... I’m grateful for technology. The connections I’ve made near and far are so important to me and keep me feeling positive at a time like this.”

“Dear Me... I’ve really appreciated the time I’ve spent with my mum over the last seven weeks and I feel lockdown has strengthened relationships as it has forced people to spend more time together than they otherwise would. On our walk today my mum told me how when she was at the same point in her life that I am now she spent less time with her parents and sisters because she got caught up in her job and relationship and raising her children. She said ‘We’ll probably never be as close as this again because you’ll start putting all of your time into those things too and it’s been really special spending this time with you’”

“Dear Me ... How have I been coping? I’ve had to stop being an introvert and start engaging with my neighbours. I initiated the nyumba kumi initiative (ten house) and I host game nights every weekend. I had to buy scrabble and monopoly. I’m actually very good at scrabble and sometimes we play cards. But the real fun is in monopoly. You have finally joined the 100 book challenge group let’s see how far you can get. Will you be able to accomplish 100 books before the end of the year? Let’s wait and see.”

‘C’, UK, #123 23, Female
However, the sense of expectation to use this time productively, creates anxiety of its own. A cultural narrative about “using time well” can be destructive and create stress.

‘S’, India, #107
25, Female

3. I’m trying to work but that is a bit of a struggle. Everything I had planned for myself didn’t work. I was suppose to do 1 artwork/illustration/poster a day but the whole situation made it difficult.

‘W’, Australia, #113
22, Female

“Specially in a time like this, there’s so many posting things about painting, and growing flowers, sometimes it’s just not what’s realistic...”

‘M’, New York, #141
21, Female

Because of lockdown I lost my job at a public school since all schools were closed and I had to continue taking my college classes online. One of the things I struggled most with was having a consistent schedule since I would structure my life around school and work. A lot of what’s helping me during this time is detaching myself from the idea that my worth is based on my productivity during these time. Following social media pages that emphasize this idea has helped. I’ve also been able to do things like paint, exercise, yoga, meditate and stay in contact with friends in order to keep me busy and help me manage during this time.

‘C’, UK, #123
23, Female

“I feel the productivity pressure that everyone’s speaking about. Ah I want to be productive. But then I realised something. Productivity is not productive unless you enjoy it. ... I need to enjoy what I’m doing. So right now, I’m just going to be drawing on my iPad, because I’ve discovered there’s lots of way you can draw on the iPad”
Young people have become more aware of mental health through this time - their own and others. They are self-reflective, and more conscious of how they are feeling, and the limits of what they can control.

“Checking in with friends more about mental health. How are they? That’s the first thing you do now. How you message them. You say how are you ... it’s different”

“Me and my girlfriends, we asked the boys, do you ever speak about your mental health to each other. One of them told us that he’d been feeling low. We got onto them saying they don’t talk about it, which lead onto some conversations with them talking about it more”

“I feel like I’ve changed, but it’s hard to pinpoint what change is. I’d say my self-consciousness has become more apparent. I’m more aware of stress. Or “grumpy issues”. More aware of mental wellbeing. I’m not a psychologist so I don’t know specifically the solutions to these issues, but I think it’s a good thing”

“I wouldn’t have thought about it before. I might say today I feel bad or stressed. But for example “feeling anxiety” I’m sure I’ve said before, but maybe I wasn’t able to recognise it ... but now I’m able to say, ah that’s what happened to me now, I really need help now.”

“Focus on what’s in my control. I can’t control everything that’s happening. I only do what I can”

“A”, UK, #132 22, Female

“A”, Hong Kong, #120 23, Male

“C”, UK, #123 23, Female

“W”, Australia, #113 22, Female
Where next...
Phase 2: Creative output

Later this year, we’ll use the insights and individual stories collected as part of Covid Living to form the basis of a cultural / creative output, intended to stimulate further discussion around ways the ‘active ingredients’ can form a basis of tackling anxiety and depression.

The Covid Living project created two outputs, that will be used in this second phase of the project.

1) A network of 50+ young people around the world
   We will reactivate and develop this network as workshop participants during the development of the cultural output, and to provide useful feedback on how we use the output to communicate more widely.

2) Individual videos, audio, letters and WhatsApp chats that detail the specific things young people did and how it helped them during the lockdown period.
   With their permission, we will use extracts from the collection to illustrate individual Active Ingredients, and how they helped people during the lockdown period.
For further information please contact
Tim Partridge (tim@weareflyingobject.com)
and Peter Law (peter@weareflyingobject.com)