

A day in the life of

Tuesday 3rd November 2020



Daniel, age 4, Elsecar Park

Director of Public Health Annual Report 2020

“

Tuesday 3rd November -
a day which should
have been normal.
It's a school day,
a workday, an
afterschool club day.
Although the activities
of my day haven't
changed, how I go
about them has.

Female, 44

”



BARNSELY
Metropolitan Borough Council

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This is an interactive document.
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Foreword

2020 has had an enormous impact on us all; how we live, how we work, how we travel, and most of all, how we feel. We're all experiencing and coping with the effects of COVID-19 differently, which may be having a toll on our physical and mental health. The pandemic will continue to affect us in many ways, and we've all had to find a new 'normal' in our everyday lives which has presented significant challenges.

In 2017, we captured a snapshot in time to illustrate the health and wellbeing of Barnsley's residents. Through the completion of a short diary, you told us about your physical and mental health and what might have made it better or worse. The response we received was overwhelming and informed how our approach to promoting good health might need to change, from the decisions we make to the services we provide.

To help me, my team and our wider partners to fully understand the challenges that the residents of Barnsley are currently facing, I once again asked you to complete a short diary on Tuesday 3rd November 2020.

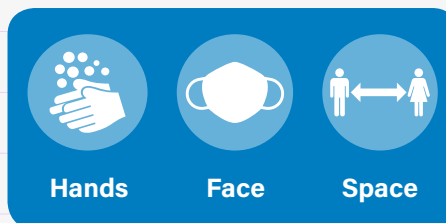
I asked you to write about your day and the impact the pandemic has had on it; to tell me about which parts of your day have changed as a result of COVID-19 and what has stayed the same; to make a note of what you and your family are doing to deal with challenges you face; to describe what matters to you most now; and finally, to tell me about the acts of kindness you have seen and experienced.

Once again, your response was fantastic, and I received over 320 diaries. What you have chosen to share with me will be used by me and my colleagues in our COVID-19 recovery plans and this, my 2020 Director of Public Health Annual Report, will inform what our focus should include.

It is difficult to predict what the full, long-term impact of COVID-19 will be. Some people will cope well and get back on their feet quickly, but others might not. However, during the past several months, what we have seen is countless amazing examples of people and communities pulling together. It's something that Barnsley is known for, and my goodness have people shown that!

This community spirit will be a driving force behind moving Barnsley forward from COVID-19.

After such a long time, it's easy for us to become complacent, and I know many of us are desperate to get back to our daily routines. The key thing you can do to help protect your community is to follow the government's guidance:



“

Barnsley people are renowned for their kindness anyway but in these unprecedented times they have been magnificent. Their generosity holds no bounds.

Female, 63

”

“

By the way I hope we can all grow as a community because #Barnsley is brill.

Female, 49

”

“

But in the midst of all this negativity and sadness there are stories that make me sob with pride at our town.

Female, 39

”

“

Thank you for asking how we are and for considering how we can all work together and do our best to keep each other safe.

Female, 62 ”



Please remember to wash your hands regularly, use a face covering when in a public space and keep your distance from those not in your household. Following these simple steps could make a significant difference in reducing the transmission of COVID-19 and help protect you and your family, friends and colleagues from the virus.

I know it hasn't been easy to change how we live, but the hard work that people in Barnsley have done in recent months to protect themselves and their community has made a huge difference.

Thank you

Julia Burrows
Director of Public Health
Barnsley Council

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Not every day do I feel like I'm getting it right, not every night do I sleep well, but I'm hopeful for a new future that brings some of the old as some of the new balance.

Female, 38 ”



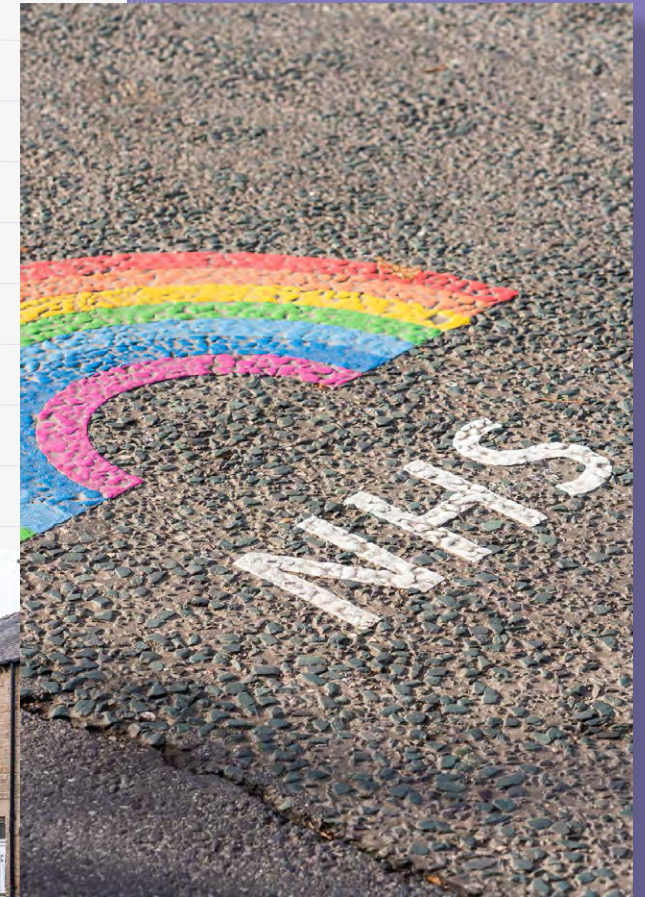
2020: What has the impact been on our Health and Wellbeing?

On 31 December 2019, China contacted the WHO reporting that “cases of pneumonia of unknown aetiology” had been detected in Wuhan. On 29 January 2020, the first two cases of COVID-19 were detected in the UK. On 30 January, WHO declared a global health emergency. On 23 March, the UK’s first lockdown came into effect.

Since then, COVID-19 has shone a harsh light on health, social, economic and political systems across the world, and on the inequalities that have been allowed to fester in our societies.

Within nine weeks of the WHO announcement, and around three weeks after the implementation of the UK’s first lockdown, this country was at its first peak in infections. By the end of April, around 90,000 people in the UK had been hospitalised and 30,000 people had died from COVID-19.

By the time of writing this, there have been over 130,000 deaths in the UK, three distinct peaks in infection, three national lockdowns and a huge impact on people, health and care services, society and the economy. With every peak in cases, the population of Barnsley has been hit very hard.



Throughout the course of the pandemic, disease surveillance and wider health intelligence has played a crucial role. Disease surveillance has helped monitor progress and strengthen the response and control of the disease, and wider health intelligence has helped strengthen resilience.

In Barnsley, organisations from across the health and care system had previously established a health intelligence group to monitor health outcomes and help improve the identification of people most in need of health and care services. As the pandemic broke out in the UK, this group became the COVID-19 Health Intelligence Cell for Barnsley, shifting its focus and way of working to provide COVID-19 surveillance and health intelligence for response and resilience.

Through the first two months of the pandemic, the Cell produced daily reports on disease, the impact of social distancing and the capacity in the hospital. This was before widespread community testing was established in the UK and instead depended on a range of proxy measures to monitor the disease and the response.

As the country emerged from the first lockdown, this frequency of reporting was reduced to twice weekly but the Cell quickly realised that the health, social and economic impact of the pandemic warranted a broader scope of surveillance and health intelligence.

The work and reporting by the group shifted from a focus only on COVID-19 infections, hospitalisations and deaths, to a more holistic scope, including: capacity across all health and social care services; the monitoring of other diseases as health and care access was reduced through pandemic contingency; community intelligence on how to support people at home; and monitoring the social, economic and emotional impact of the pandemic.

This exercise in strengthening health intelligence to improve the shorter-term response to the pandemic in Barnsley has created learning opportunities that will help us improve the way we recover and the way we work for the long-term. Three of the most powerful lessons include:

1.

Open information sharing across the health and social care system and with the social, education and economic sectors creates a much more balanced measure of health and well-being, capacity and impact, and supports a culture of collaboration for more effective and efficient services and health improvement;

2.

Seeking experience by listening to the voices of people, communities and groups rather than only reporting data and service activity. This has generated a more meaningful narrative to the health intelligence and a deeper understanding of health and wellbeing in Barnsley;

3.

Interpreting wellbeing in a more holistic sense than only physical illness and identifying vulnerabilities to health in the physical, mental, social and economic aspects that determine our lives has helped Barnsley to prioritise people most at risk of suffering.



There are many challenges ahead. While COVID-19 rages on and the progress of the vaccination programme depends on so much effort from people and services already exhausted by the pandemic, we all need to stay vigilant and keep infections down. At the same time, we need to think ahead and consider how the harsh and critical light that the infection has shone on our health, social and economic systems is heeded and helps us to build back fairer.

The Cell is working hard to ensure that collaboration and information sharing for health is sustained. We are embedding the approach to supporting people most vulnerable first. However, none of this is easy nor is it inevitable. As the pandemic does come under control, our focus will shift from a single disease and an acute response, to a much broader scope and longer timeline.

How do we replicate this approach to health and intelligence across all ideas of wellbeing and all services, when the context is broadened back from only COVID-19?

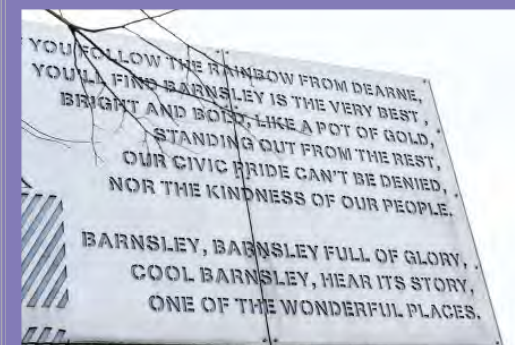
How do we increase our engagement with all people in Barnsley and understanding of experience across all aspects of health when we are enduring the economic fallout out of a pandemic?

How do we maintain a capacity for this most collaborative way of working and understanding health when all of us and our organisations are trying to recover?

How do we collectively understand our information and data strengths and weaknesses across the system, and fill the gaps so that we can make a lasting difference to the health of the people of Barnsley.

The answer to these questions is in and of themselves. It is through this approach of collaboration and a wider understanding of the synergies between health, education, economy and society that we have maintained resilience through a pandemic. It is through these things that we will build back fairer.

A key to learning from the pandemic and doing things better from what we have learned is improving how we engage with people and communities. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey covering the period 11th to 15th November 2020, aimed to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people, households and communities across Great Britain. This is a new part of the survey and the results are based on 6,029 people aged 16 and over. The full survey details can be found here [ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey](#). We have considered the results which cover a similar time period as *A Day in the life* of to understand any differences and similarities to how Barnsley residents were feeling on 3rd November compared to the rest of the country.





Our wellbeing

- 70% of adults in England reported that they were very or somewhat worried about the effect of COVID-19 on their life right now.
- 62% of adults reported lack of freedom and independence as their main concern.
- Nearly half of adults reported that their well-being was being affected (for example, boredom, loneliness, anxiety and stress) by the pandemic.

Support and understanding of local lockdown measures

- Around 65% of adults reported finding it very easy or easy to understand the current lockdown measures where they live.
- However, around 12% found it very difficult or difficult to follow measures. Common reasons for this include impact on wellbeing, life events being missed and strain on relationship with family and friends.

Physical contact

- 18% of adults reported that they were in direct physical contact with at least one other person indoors.
- 7% of adults reported that they were in direct physical contact with at least 1 other person, excluding those in their household or support bubble, when socialising outdoors.

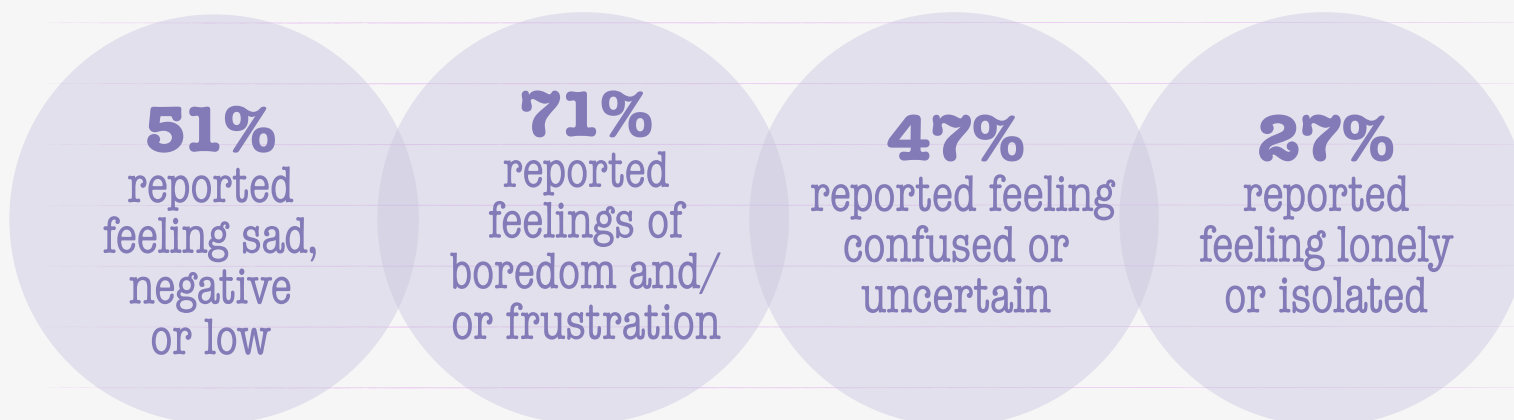
Impact on work

- 52% of working adults reported that COVID-19 was affecting their work.
- 40% reported working from home in the past 7 days.

In 2020, Barnsley Council introduced an 'Emotional Health and Wellbeing Survey' to capture how Children and Young People (CYP) in Barnsley are coping with the impact of Covid-19 and the changing restrictions. The survey is distributed to all schools and key partners who work with children and young people every 4-6 weeks so that we can track how feelings and emotions are changing over the course of the pandemic. To date, we have received around 1500 responses, providing useful insight into the emotional wellbeing of children and young people throughout this period of significant change in their lives.

Here are some key points we need to think about:

Children and Young People are reporting a negative impact of the pandemic on their mental health. On average, across three waves of the CYP Emotional Health and Wellbeing Survey, between July and November 2020:



Children and Young People in the CYP Emotional Health and Wellbeing Survey also told us of the positives of the pandemic and living under lockdown, including: being able to spend more time with family, having time to learn new skills, having more free time and having a more "relaxed" pace of life.

On average, across three waves of the survey during the course of the pandemic, 55% have increased their creativity level and 52% have increased the amount of time they 'connect' with others.

Self-care has been negatively impacted on amongst children and young people taking part in the survey. For example, during the course of the pandemic (July-November 2020) we have seen a decrease in the number of CYP who report sticking to a daily routine, an increase in the amounts of time spent gaming and/or watching TV and a decrease in the amount of time spent outside.

Some quotes from the Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Survey:



I felt scared at first, mostly because of doing schoolwork at home and not seeing my friends, but the longer it has lasted, I've gotten more sad because I have barely had social interaction outside of home.



I see my dad more because he's furloughed or on part time hours. I've missed extended family though, the summer BBQs, the meals out, the day trips. My baby brother doesn't know anyone else because he's not seen them.



“

I'm starting to become really restless at home, not really getting on too well with my family. Had quite a few arguments, felt like just leaving the house for the rest of the day. I have one friend who I keep going to when I need her.

”

COVID-19 - IMPACT ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Consultation with Children and Young People during Covid-19 pandemic July to November 2020

Thoughts and Feelings

83% have been feeling safe/secure



47% have been feeling confused or uncertain

33% have been feeling less positive about the future

51% report feeling sad, negative or low

35% report feeling scared or panicked



71% have been feeling bored or frustrated

27% have been feeling lonely or isolated



Lifestyle Changes

33% spending more time outside

52% have increased the amount of time they connect with others (e.g. via video calls)



73%



33%

28% have increased their exercise/physical activity



55% have increased their creativity level



50%



67%

Having good mental health and positivity

You told me about how your mental health is suffering. People are anxious, stressed, and worried about the future for themselves and their children.

There are a range of emotional reactions during a pandemic as people respond to the emerging threat and adapt to new social and working environments. Some people may have a strong sense of collective identity and display remarkable acts of altruism. However, many people experience fear, anxiety, uncertainty, confusion, stress, frustration and boredom. These can result in changes in things like eating patterns, sleeping or concentrating. In addition, "social distancing" strategies, although vital for the COVID-19 response, clash with the deep-seated human instinct to connect with others, especially during emotional times. Social connection helps people regulate affect, cope with stress, and remain resilient during difficult times.

While many people have acted in solidarity in response to COVID-19, and there will be some positive benefits from this community spirit and response, the epidemic will likely have many psychological impacts on the population which may have a detrimental effect on the short, medium and long-term mental health of some of our residents. In turn, this may reduce people's resilience and their ability to cope. Longer term impacts in terms of trauma, grief and distress may exacerbate the mental ill-health in the community long after recovery.

A normal reaction to an unusual situation.

The COVID-19 pandemic means that life is changing for all of us for a while. It may cause residents to feel anxious, stressed, worried, sad, bored, lonely or frustrated. But it's important to remember it is OK to feel this way and that everyone reacts differently.



“

This mental instability is unusual for me as I have never suffered like this or had such worries and anxieties prior to the pandemic.

Female, 31

”

“

Pure exhaustion from worry. Will today be the day I have caught it.

Female, 48

”

“

Anxiety is not something I normally suffer from but these are not normal times.

Female, 63

”



I will do whatever it takes to see us through the other side of this pandemic.

Female, 54



There are some simple things people can do to help take care of their mental health and wellbeing during times of uncertainty and the 5 ways to wellbeing is a really good way to do this. Doing so will help you to look after yourself, your community and those you care about.

Looking after our own mental health: Five Ways to Wellbeing

We all have mental health just like we have physical health and it's important that we take steps to look after it. The following steps, known as the 'five ways to wellbeing', are easy and can be incorporated into our daily lives almost straight away, even through COVID-19 restrictions.

1. Connect with others

Feeling close to and valued by other people is a fundamental human need and can help you build a sense of belonging and self-worth. Whilst COVID-19 has made it difficult to physically connect with family and friends, there is lots we can still do to stay connected. By using technology like Zoom or FaceTime, or simply picking up the telephone, we can stay socially connected. If you don't feel like you've got anyone to talk to, you could try volunteering or find a local community group with similar interests to yourself. You'd be surprised just how rewarding this can be!

2. Be physically active

Being active is not just great for your physical health, evidence shows it can also improve your mental wellbeing. You don't have to spend hours in a gym to be active; find activities you enjoy and make them a part of your everyday life. Barnsley is blessed with some fabulous countryside and green spaces, you could go for a walk, dance or do some gardening. Maybe try the 'Couch to 5k'. More information on free activities is available on the NHS website [here](#).

3. Learn new skills

Learning new skills can boost your self-esteem and help build a sense of purpose. Learning doesn't need to be formal, time-consuming or expensive. You could read a book, try cooking something new, do a puzzle or try out new hobbies. You could work on a DIY project, by following free online tutorials. There are also some great adult learning facilities in Barnsley, if you want to learn something more formal (like a language) – just search online!

4. Give to others

Giving and acts of kindness can increase mental wellbeing, helping to create positive feelings and a sense of reward.

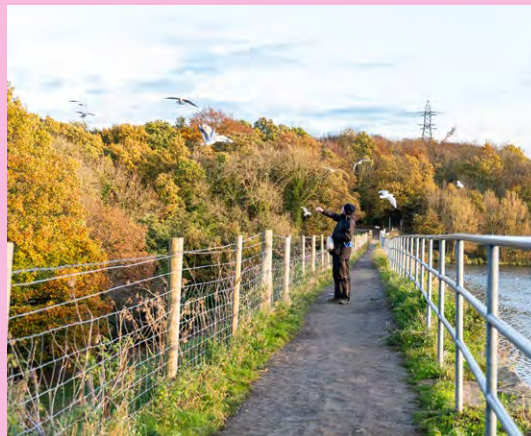
Giving can range from a small act of kindness, like saying thank you or offering to help someone, to larger acts like volunteering in your community. If you'd be interested in volunteering in your community, contact Barnsley CVS to find out about opportunities that would suit you. You can [click here](#) to visit their website or give them a call on: 01226 812183.

5. Take notice (mindfulness)

Being aware of the present moment can directly enhance your wellbeing. Paying attention to your thoughts and feelings and the world around you can positively change the way we see ourselves and our lives – some people call this mindfulness.

More information on mindfulness, including practical ways to be more mindful can be found on the NHS website [here](#).

But we shouldn't feel like we need to 'put a brave face on it' and it is very important to talk to your GP if you are struggling.



“

I feel very low and isolated. I feel like I'm being watched and judged if I leave the house, my mental health is definitely in decline.

Female, 57 ”

“

I am usually in reasonable good spirits but there is some stress caused by the unknowns associated with the impact of Covid 19.

Male, 78 ”



Some days I don't speak to anyone apart from the children and they are feeling the strain or missing normality so our household is not a happy harmonious one due to the anxiety and frustration we are all experiencing.

Female, 44



Mentally always struggle a bit this time of year, but really feeling a bit defeated this year. Defeated and bored.

Male, 40



Our **#AlrightPal?** campaign is all about starting the conversation around mental health and wellbeing.

Talking about mental health doesn't have to be scary; it's simply our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It's important to understand and manage our mental health as it affects how we think, feel and act.

Sometimes people feel as though they don't want to burden anyone with their problems, so they don't discuss it and bottle things up. Asking somebody a simple question to check they're alright can make a huge difference. You don't need to know all the answers. Just listen.

If you're worried about someone who might be experiencing mental health issues there's lots you can do to help. Read our tips here [Alright Pal](#) for how to start a conversation. You can also find lots of advice and information about partner services that can help.

I do not underestimate the daily challenges that residents face and the impact this has on health and wellbeing. If you have been feeling depressed for more than a few weeks and your level of anxiety is affecting your daily life then it might be time to seek further help, support or information.

If your mental health issue is urgent, you must make an appointment to see your GP.

The NHS is open, and we urge you to continue to access all the NHS services that you need, regardless of any lockdown restriction. It is safer for you to use the NHS than to try to manage alone. You can also quickly and easily access a range of NHS services from home, including ordering repeat prescriptions or having an online appointment with your healthcare professional. To find out more visit: www.nhs.uk/health-at-home or download the NHS App.

If you've had thoughts of self-harming, or you are feeling suicidal, contact someone you can trust immediately, such as your GP, or a friend or relative. The Samaritans helpline is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for people who want to talk in confidence. Call 116 123 (free).



Keeping our spirits high

For some, life has slowed down which has brought a better quality of life and we are learning new things.

You told me about making the most of what we can do and not dwelling on what we can't.

Positivity and positive thinking do not mean that you keep your head in the sand and ignore life's challenges. It just means that you approach such challenges in a more positive and productive way. You think the best is going to happen, not the worst.

There are many things we can all do to help us to maintain a positive outlook and find better coping skills during times of stress.

There's no doubt from what you told me that this was easier in summer when the days were long and we had lots of daylight.

You also said that it's harder to keep motivated and get out and about, especially when it's dark and the weather is miserable.

I understand how difficult it is to keep positive when everyone is living in such difficult times. However, I hope that some of the examples here which residents have shared with me will inspire you to find ways of boosting your mental wellbeing and stop anxiety and stress from becoming overwhelming.

Having something to focus on, no matter how small, can help you to feel positive.



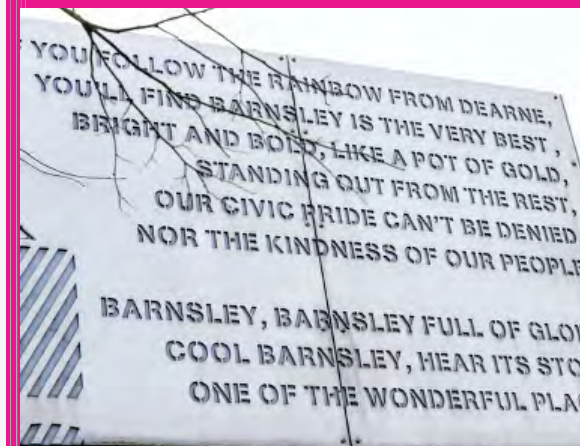
The lack of other pressures has allowed us to focus on being outdoors more which is good. We have cooked from scratch more and used the extra time to experiment with more plant based and vegan food, also very good.

Female, 57



My morning commute has recently been replaced with a 45 minute walk. As I go I reflect on the day ahead and plan out what I need to achieve. It's a beautiful morning, crisp with blue skies and the first signs of frost on fallen leaves.

Male, 50





Holidays abroad and pub lunches appear to be on hold, but it's not the end of the world and I'm sure they'll come back sooner rather than later.

Female, 52



The main positive about this period is that it has given me time to re-evaluate my life. It gave me space. I started going for long walks in the morning before work with just me and the dog.

Female, 56



It is important to me that we stay upbeat and try not to become too disheartened.

Female, 40



I love reading, and before this, I felt that I had lost the time to do it - turns out I just never prioritised it and MADE the time to do it.

Female, 22



I put the radio on to sing along. I love music, it really does lift my spirits and escape from the world.

Female, 22



I am making lists of small jobs so I achieve something every day.

Male, 65





I enjoy cooking and have welcomed the opportunity to spend time trying out new recipes and doing online cookery courses.

Female, 69



I planned lots of fancy days out before. Now we have entire weekends where we don't spend a penny, we go on 'adventure' walks and play in our garden or the house. Simple things that before I wouldn't have thought could've filled an entire weekend.

Female, 36



Before I started work today, I went on a walk around my village. I do this most days and find that it does really help with my mental health.

Male, 53



Getting out in nature helps me to restore and reconnect and realise that what we are going through is only temporary and it will pass.

Female, 56



As a result of the outbreak I try and make sure I fill each day and also that each day is different so that there is some perception of a different routine on a day to day basis.

Male, 67



The jewel in our life is our Friday morning choir, live Zoom session where we have a great 2hrs sing and chat... just fabulous! It's really uplifting!!

Male 70



The importance of a good job and work life balance

Having a good, safe and secure job can improve your mental health and a positive work life balance is something we all need to aim for.

Work life balance does not mean spending equal amounts of time between work and our personal lives. There is no perfect, one-size fits all balance that we should be striving for. The best work-life balance is different for each of us because none of our priorities and lives are the same.

However, there are two key everyday concepts that are relevant to each of us: daily achievement and enjoyment. Most of us want to do well and achieve but we must also try and enjoy life.

Some residents wrote about how the changes to the way they carry out their job has resulted in a much better work life balance. But others feel enormous pressure and are exhausted.

Technology has enabled more of us to work from home effectively during the pandemic. However, some residents described being unable to separate work and home life.

This has resulted in working more hours because there is no longer the same distinction between shutting a laptop down at the end of the day and physically leaving the office or workplace to travel home.



“ I find it hard to separate work from home life as it all happens in the same space. **Female, 44** ”

“ My working day has got longer, more frantic and more pressured. **Female, 58** ”

“ Sometimes I miss the boundary that travelling to and from work gave me and the time to reflect on my way home. **Female, 59** ”

The benefits of having a good work life balance are clear.

We are generally more productive and take less time off. Residents with a good work life balance are also more likely to be happier, healthier and motivated.

Working towards and achieving a good work life balance can have huge benefits for our physical and mental health but I know that some people have no or little choice and this is something we will continue to address:

- We all need and want to work hard to keep Barnsley's economy growing and sometimes large amounts of downtime just isn't possible. But it's all about finding that balance. By recognising your own individual triggers and understanding when you're overdoing it, you'll be able to recognise the early warning signs before you start burning out.

Tip - Don't ignore the signs. Feeling tired? Sleep. Getting ill? Take a day off. There's nothing wrong with giving yourself a break.

- Having a healthy work-life balance isn't just essential to your well-being, it also boosts your productivity. From finally getting around to redecorating because you switched off your work phone for the weekend, to completing a work task you've been stuck on for weeks after being able to go back to it with a fresh mindset, creating a good balance between your work life and your personal life will allow you to be more productive in both areas.

Tip - Keep your life balanced with work, recreation, and rest in order to stay fully functional.

- Always dreading work? Find yourself setting your alarm on snooze every morning? Don't know what a weekend is? You probably need to give yourself a break. A dislike of your job (or just about anything) is one of the most common signs of a non-existent work-life balance.

Tip - Sometimes all it takes is allowing regular breaks to put things into perspective.

- You'll have more 'you time.' It's easy to make excuses not to do some something when you rarely get free time. You shouldn't have to sacrifice that much of yourself to do a good job. After all, work isn't the only place you can learn and develop. From learning a new language, taking up a hobby, or even just reading a book and making the most of your time could add some much-needed variation and enjoyment into your life.

Tip - Don't sacrifice your free time just to put the extra hours in every single day - especially if it means giving up on your own personal development. There's a time and a place for everything.

- Those who overwork have one thing in common - and this is that everything in their lives except work probably isn't going as well as it could.

Tip - achieving a good work-life balance often comes down to your own ability to prioritise according to what's most important to you. Working extra hard can be important but your relationships and social life should not be sacrificed as a result.

“

Couldn't sleep last night for worrying – second night in a row – I am feeling really stressed and I feel like I should be off sick – but I have too much work and too many deadlines and I just have to carry on.

Female, 60

”

Our connections with others

Being cut off from social interaction is not only a problem for the elderly but also younger people and the impact it has on our bodies is thought to be equivalent to smoking over a dozen cigarettes a day (Public Health England, 2015).

Social isolation is a significant consequence of COVID-19. A general population survey (Ipsos MORI, 2020) revealed widespread concerns about the effects of social isolation and distancing, including increased anxiety and depression.

Self-isolation, national and local restrictions have meant that we have not been able to be with those we would normally spend time with outside of our home and far too many residents are feeling lonely and isolated as a result of the pandemic.

Although crucial in controlling and reducing COVID-19 transmission, it sadly came as no surprise that residents told us about how they are missing their family, friends and colleagues. Some residents go for days without speaking to anyone and those who live alone have sometimes struggled.

It is important to remember these changes will not be forever and advice and support is available through a number of local organisations.

Crucially, your diary entries were a stark reminder that for some, the loneliness and social isolation experienced is their normal.

! A priority for us all is to continue to tackle what clearly remains a significant public health challenge. !

There is arguably a large overlap between social isolation and loneliness and both of these can have a detrimental effect on health and wellbeing under normal circumstances. This risk is greater for some than others, and as is often the case, it's those who are already vulnerable.

In Barnsley, 6 Area Councils commission a range of services that support communities with social isolation and loneliness – many of these were set up pre-COVID but have become all the more important since the pandemic started.

Area Teams work closely in partnership with several organisations that support local residents. Services like My Best Life (Social Prescribing in Barnsley), who offer support to all adults who are socially isolated, and the new Social Prescribing service for younger people called Link Works which is delivered by the Barnsley GP Federation are a couple of examples.



In addition, Area Teams have also supported over 300 people as part of the COVID-19 Emergency Contact Centre which was set up as part of the first lockdown. This included matching 271 Community Responders across the 6 Area Teams to offer support to local people for befriending and shopping during the pandemic. All the people that were supported required more than one intervention and some have needed support throughout lockdown – others have been referred into the commissioned services and continue to be supported.



I get up wondering if I will speak to anyone today. I try to stay focussed but it isn't easy when you live alone.

Female, 73



The house is quiet and so I put on the TV for a bit of background noise. I might see the postman to say hello to, but other than that I can go days without speaking to another adult! It's very lonely.

Female, 47



Today is much the same as every other day. The pandemic has had little or no effect on me. I spend most of my days in the house. I'm used to staying in with no company and no one to talk to. It's normal for me. Welcome to my world.

Female, 72



It's sometimes hard to see my smile behind a mask (I smile a lot) but my eyes are often smiling and if I see someone who looks sad or worried I will always stop and ask if they are okay.

Female, 45



New parents are struggling, and others feel the impact of caring responsibilities, both young and old.



“

As a family we don't do anything anymore together out of the house, we used to go to play groups, playgrounds, events. Now we try to keep busy at home but it's not the same. Kids get frustrated we get frustrated I find myself crying by the end of the day.

Female, 25

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Maternity leave is a time when women need to be careful with isolation, so maternity leave in a pandemic is extra worry.

Female, 39

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“

Preparing to go to the last 'face to face' baby group - baby sensory later this morning. Such a lifeline for me when on maternity leave. Even though it's different - we have to wear masks and stay apart there is something comforting in these sessions and little glimpses of normal life.

Female, 39

”

“

What do new mums do when they need a rest? Family and friends are usually on hand to look after the baby. Oh, but not during lockdown they aren't. All I needed was a break...I needed social contact, I needed a hand.

That hand was not there.

Female, 20+

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”



Many new parents have been cut off from their support networks of family and friends and are no longer able to build peer support through contact with other parents in the community, or in group settings. New mums in particular are feeling isolated as a result of restrictions.

Our 0-19 Public Health Nursing Service is working hard to make sure we are still here for families and we are continuing to provide our service through a combination of face to face and virtual methods. Our Facebook site has gone from strength to strength since the lockdown began. We have established a small team to source appropriate links and resources from trusted organisations and websites to provide key health promotion and evidenced based messages and signposting to resources for support. Alongside this, the service is proactively extending the reach and offer to meet needs in the current climate, and offers the Facebook instant messenger facility Monday-Friday 9am-4pm for non-urgent questions, making it easier for parents to access support and advice.

Our service can offer video calling which can enable practitioners to see a child if a parent wants us to visualise something but not able to have a face to face contact.

Provision of parent and breast-feeding groups has been impacted but we have looked at innovative ways to continue these and now have closed Facebook groups which deliver antenatal infant feeding education and support programmes. We are looking at expanding on these to include other subjects like potty training and managing behaviour etc.

If you are a parent or carer who is struggling, please contact the service either through our single point of access telephone line 01226 774411 Monday to Thursday 8.45am to 16.45pm, Friday 8.45am to 16.15pm or email us at 0-19HealthTeam@barnsley.gov.uk or visit us on Facebook@BarnsleyPHNS or @BarnsleyInfantFeedingTeam

There is also a raft of information for parents around things to do, information, advice and support at [Barnsley Family Services Directory](#) and under the emotional wellbeing and health section, there are details on what we offer.



We feel guilty about what we cannot do and the experiences our children are missing out on. We miss our families and our friends and the physical affection that comes with it.

We must never underestimate the value of human contact; from hugging our loved ones to chatting with colleagues over a cup of tea. Many grandparents told me about the impact they felt as a result of not seeing their grandchildren.



Thank goodness technology allows us to keep in touch, share photos, exchange supportive messages - but it's not the same as being there to hold their hands.

Female, 69



It's hard to escape the constant feeling of guilt... feeling guilty that I'm not spending time with the children and expecting them not to come into the kitchen, getting frustrated that they're interrupting calls (it's really not their fault!), but also feeling guilty that I'm not able to concentrate on work fully.

Female, 40



The pandemic has had a massive impact on me and my family. I currently feel that I'm not doing either of my work/life roles well and I constantly feel stressed and worried about missing something or dropping one of the balls I'm juggling

Female, 42



Missing giving our family a hug, we speak most days on the phone but you miss contact, but it has to be done to keep us safe.

Female, 70



People miss their colleagues and the impact of professional isolation is clear.



I miss the spontaneous conversations you can have with colleagues when you work alongside them.

Female, 58



The monotony of a constant stream of Teams meetings is getting really quite tough now. These are the biggest impacts of the pandemic - zero variety and lack of interaction.

Female, 49





Community is there if you go out and embrace it. Someone will be there to talk to you if you ring them. Let someone know you need support and it's there. Be positive and reach out.

Female, 45



Barnsley people are tough and care deeply about their community.

Female, 45



Helping each other and community spirit

Volunteering, helping others and acts of kindness.

Residents told me about how living through the pandemic has given them insight and a deeper understanding about other people's lives and situations that they might otherwise have taken for granted or not even thought about. The lockdown periods have afforded people more time to reflect and be more mindful about what others are experiencing every day and not just because of COVID-19.

Volunteering is defined as an unpaid activity where an individual gives their time to help a not-for-profit organisation or people they are not related to.

Ultimately, the main benefits of volunteering is the impact your time has on the community. Unpaid volunteers are sometimes the one's that hold a community together. Volunteering allows people to connect to their community and make it a better place. However, volunteering is a two-way street, and it can benefit you and your family as much as the organisation or cause you choose to help. Dedicating your time as a volunteer helps you make new friends, expand your network, and boost your social skills.

Barnsley Council is celebrating the amazing response from residents of the borough who have volunteered during the COVID-19 pandemic. So far, a total of 1,251 people have come forward to volunteer to work in partnership with Barnsley Community & Voluntary Sector to help to support their community through the COVID-19 pandemic via a Community Responder scheme.

The response has been fantastic, and it's one example of how residents' Barnsley spirit has been shining bright in light of the very difficult challenges that the borough has faced.

In addition to the Community Responders, a programme of work was developed in April 2020 to engage volunteers to make face masks for the general population. This work witnessed the involvement of 102 volunteer sewers who made face masks, nearly 15000 masks made and given to people and raised just over £3500 for Barnsley hospital charity.

The support and dedication of residents and communities is essential to keeping Barnsley moving, now and in the future. The council recognises and appreciates the effort from volunteers, key workers, colleagues, partners and residents for doing their bit to build stronger and more resilient communities in a different way to meet the 'new normal'.



Residents told us about witnessing acts of kindness every day.



I have a network of older friends... who I keep in touch with in case they need some help, particularly isolation. Where possible I help them.

Male, 79



Barnsley is blessed to have such caring people working in the community.

Female, 54



There are positives from the pandemic though... from being at home more, I've formed really good relationships with my neighbours, meaning we now watch out for each other and do neighbourly things like taking in parcels and putting the bins out for each other.

Male, 26



I'm amazed at how my little village does come together in times such as this.

Male, 41



You have neighbours who have been so kind, especially during the lockdown when you were unable to leave the house except to attend funerals. The people you thought of as acquaintances went out of their way to make sure your letters were posted; the Fish and Chip suppers which arrived at tea time on Friday, courtesy of the local pub, which an unknown person had ordered for you.

Female, 86



I really enjoy spending time with the volunteers... when the weather is good and we finish a job like we did this morning you feel like you've achieved something regardless of COVID-19.

Female, 60



There are positives from the pandemic though... from being at home more, I've formed really good relationships with my neighbours, meaning we now watch out for each other and do neighbourly things like taking in parcels and putting the bins out for each other.

Male, 26



Barnsley is full of such wonderful community organisations and people prepared to try and help the vulnerable who inspire me all the time.

Female, 49





I do find having nothing on the calendar to look forward to difficult though.

Female, 73 ””

Our self-care

We all need something to look forward to in life. In fact, a healthy sense of anticipation can often help energise our lives and help us get through tough times.

While living in the present is a very beneficial thing – sometimes the present can feel a bit annoying, frustrating, tedious, or intolerable.

Residents told me about how they are struggling without anything to look forward to. Some described their days as monotonous which appears to be having an impact on sleeping patterns.



The monotonous and repetitive nature of the day captured in just 10 words: *Go to work, go home, have tea, go to bed.*

Male, 52 ”



I think the monotony of lockdown and relative lack of physical activity is affecting my sleeping pattern and I am unsure how to fix it.

Gender not stated, 25 ”



I have been sleeping a lot but am rarely feeling rested. I think the monotony of lockdown and relative lack of physical activity is affecting my sleeping pattern and I am unsure how to fix it.

Gender not stated, 25 ”



I'm sleeping more and more, sometimes 10-11 hours. I think this is boredom, I simply want the day to end and move onto the next one.

Male, 23 ”

Sleep is crucial to our health and wellbeing. An occasional night without sleep makes you feel tired and miserable the following day, but prolonged nights with poor sleep can lead to more serious issues and undoubtedly make us feel down and our mood low.

At a time when many people are worried or anxious about COVID-19, and with the number of people across the country struggling to sleep on the rise, Public Health England (PHE) has launched new guidance on its 'Every Mind Matters' website to help people improve their sleep.

It comes as new data from PHE shows that more than four in ten (41 per cent) of us are experiencing more sleep problems than usual, with over half of 16-29-year olds (52 per cent) the most likely to be affected.

In addition, those already experiencing mental health problems more than usual are also more likely to be impacted. Among those experiencing low mood more than usual, 77% report more sleep problems during the outbreak, as do 67% of those experiencing stress more than usual and 66% of those with anxiety.

Sleep plays a critical role when it comes to maintaining positive mental wellbeing: long-term sleep loss can lead to issues such as anxiety and depression.

In answer to this, Every Mind Matters advice has been updated with a range of things we can all do to look after our mental wellbeing and help others, to prevent any concerns from becoming more serious.

Alongside the new sleep support and advice, Every Mind Matters encourages people to complete a personal 'Mind Plan', a quick and free interactive tool offering tailored mental wellbeing advice. For more information visit [Every Mind Matters](#)

Furthermore, Barnsley Council has developed sleep toolkits for residents, families and employers which can be found here: [Barnsley Sleep Toolkit](#)

The toolkit provides practical information and guidance on creating a sleep-friendly environment and understanding the importance of sleep and recovery. The toolkit also gives valuable advice and sleep hygiene tips to help people to make healthier choices at work and at home.



We want to eat healthier, reduce our drinking and exercise more.

Ultimately, we eat foods and drink liquids to sustain life and to meet our body's need for growth, repair and function. However, food and the experience of eating means so much more and can play a major role in life. We eat to socialise, celebrate, and commiserate. We eat when we're happy, when we're sad, angry, bored, anxious, or stressed. And sometimes, we simply eat because food is there or because it's 12 noon and we've eaten at that time every day for as long as we can remember.

Many of us will have turned to food at some point for comfort, to help us cope with stressful experiences, and to satisfy cravings or desires. With all the uncertainty and disruptions caused to our lives by the pandemic, it is a completely normal response to have found ourselves eating more than we usually would.



Probably binge-eat sugary things, I have put 16lbs on since lockdown.

Female, 45



I find myself eating more takeaways than before, or a generally unhealthy diet - by having ready meals or easy to cook food.

Male, 26



My main challenge has been weight gain.

Male, 37



Lockdowns and tiered restrictions have meant being stuck at home with the fridge and food cupboards always just metres away. It has also meant we've had fewer opportunities for exercise or social activities. Naturally, these somewhat involuntary changes in our behaviour can lead to an increase in our calorie intake and a decrease in how much we move. These two things combined create the perfect storm for weight gain.



Snacking is a comfort I guess.

Female, 48



I'm overweight and although I have tried to exercise more recently, having two children self isolating has put paid to that.

Female, 40



Regardless of whether you've gained weight or not this year, if you've found yourself to be snacking more on healthier, high fat, high sugar, or high salt foods, then think about how you can make healthier changes to your diet and eating habits. It's more important now than ever to be fit, healthy and to give our body the nutrients it needs.



Had a good healthy lunch - finally trying to stop binge eating and cutting out sugary goods which has increased dramatically during the

COVID-19 period.

Female, 58



I exercise every day, have made better food choices, feel more mentally resilient and cut back on carbs and alcohol.

Female, 56



You can browse the following links to find more information about how to eat well and stay healthy.

- NHS Eat Well
- Change for Life
- Pregnancy and eating well
- Weaning
- Barnsley's healthy lunchbox toolkit

Barnsley's specialist [weight management service](#) can support residents in Barnsley to achieve a healthier weight. The aim of the service is to reduce health risks, improve co-morbidity and encourage a healthy and active lifestyle with an overall improvement in health and wellbeing.



When Lockdown started I was Clinically Obese and realised this made me more vulnerable to the virus. So in August I signed up for the Second Nature NHS course. This is week 15 and I have lost 10kg. **Female, 56**



Our relationship with alcohol has changed

Some residents wrote about how their alcohol consumption has increased during the pandemic which is a trend nationally.



I know my alcohol consumption has increased during this time as I find it does help me to relax of an evening, I also know that it's not very beneficial in the long term.

Female, 63



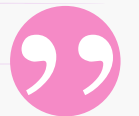
Never used to mid-week drink but it's happening at least a couple of nights per week these days (not such a good new normal here).

Female, 57



Lockdown and 18 weeks of furlough haven't done a great deal for my mental health - my drinking has got a bit out of control and I've piled the pounds on.

Male, 51



Often people do want to make changes to their alcohol use and recognise the impact it is having but perceived shame and stigma make that step more difficult. Barnsley's DrinkCoach provides information, advice and, where appropriate, treatment in a digital format. This allows people to access help discretely and at a day and time that suits each individual.

DrinkCoach consists of three elements: a screening tool to identify what level someone's drinking is at; an online coaching service and an App designed to help people track and change their drinking patterns.

- Our [free app](#) is an easy way to keep an eye on your drinking and has loads of brilliant features.
- Take the [Alcohol Test](#) to work out how risky your drinking is, access personalised advice online and find out where you can get support if you need it. No strings attached.
- The test is a digital version of the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) developed by the World Health Organisation. It is the best alcohol screening tool available. You cannot be identified by the answers you provide, and we do not collect or store personally identifiable information.



How the app works with our DrinkCoach sessions

If you're working with a DrinkCoach via our [online coaching](#) sessions, you'll be tasked with keeping a drink diary to help track your progress. The App is a convenient way to do that. Just download it to your smartphone and you're ready to record. No pens and paper needed.

Feeling pressure to drink

You have probably been in situations where someone offers you an alcoholic drink and you feel like you have to drink it. Or perhaps you offer people a drink and make sure that they join in the fun. Peer pressure to drink alcohol is common in our everyday lives; from parties, your local pub, to nowadays COVID-19 pandemic friendly social distancing beers on Zoom with your mates.

A common perception is that peer pressure exists mainly in young people. However, peer pressure can affect people of all ages. Social surroundings often influence peer pressure to drink. Drinking is seen as 'a sociable thing' – as normal and helping you to fit in.

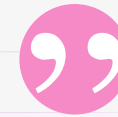
The next time that you're at a party, in the pub or having social distancing beers on Zoom, will you recognise when you are pressured to drink? Will you cave into the peer pressure, or have a strategy to deal with it? And what can you do to make sure that people don't feel like they have to drink alcohol if they don't want to?

#IT'SOKNOTTODRINK



I have stopped drinking alcohol altogether as this became a habit that was creeping upwards during the first lockdown. Stopping drinking has been a massive positive and lockdown has helped as there haven't been many social occasions.

Female, 49



Physical activity is extremely important to us and the impact of gym closures has been significant

Being physically active during the COVID-19 pandemic is very important for your physical and mental health. It can enhance your mood, wellbeing and energy levels by helping to reduce stress, anxiety and depression.

There's a risk of becoming less active as we spend more time at home. It's important to stay active, sit less and move more for your physical and mental health and wellbeing.

When we think about being active and moving, it is all too easy to start thinking it has to be something big like going to a gym or running a marathon. But it doesn't have to be those things. Whilst those things are great for some people, being active and moving more means different things to different people such as walking, gardening, cycling and dancing. We all need to find the right activity that works for us whether it is the gym or walking to work. The important thing is that being active and moving more feels right for you, is something you enjoy and fits into your daily life.

Being active can be whatever you want it to be and it doesn't have to be hours of sweating for it to have huge benefits to you. It can be feeling more energetic, sleeping better, being more confident, having an improved mood and generally feeling happy. Longer term, the benefits of being active can help to strengthen your heart, lungs and bones, and can also reduce the risk of developing several diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease.

Being active and moving more as part of our everyday lives is so important to our physical health and mental wellbeing. Making some little changes can have huge benefits that we experience straight away. As long as it gets your heart beating a bit faster and makes you breathe a bit harder then it all counts. A good way to thinking about how much exercise you need to do is that some is good, but more is better.

Our tips to being more active include:

- Think about how you can be more active in your normal day. Such as take the stairs instead of the lift or walk when you would have usually used a car or bus.
- Set yourself a goal to work towards.
- Focus on how you feel after you have been active.
- Be kind, don't put too much pressure on yourself.



You told me about how exercising with others keeps you motivated.

“

My new normal means trying to stay as fit and healthy as possible.

Female, 60

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“

I have walked miles around the neighbourhood in the summer, using lots of footpaths that I would never have known about. I have made use of the library online service which has been really good.

Female, 47

”

“

I cleared some important emails and got ready to go to Barnsley Active Hub to collect an electric bike applied for some weeks ago

Male, 71

”

“

I had never done yoga before lockdown and it is honestly one of my biggest takeaways.

Female, 36

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“

Enjoying countryside and wildlife. The pandemic has opened my world to walks in the park.

Female, 38

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“

Fortunately I have the company of a cocker spaniel dog whose daily walks got me out in the beautiful countryside around where I live

Female, 69

”

“

At lunchtime I go for a walk which I didn't always make time for when I was in the office, so that makes a nice change.

Female, 25

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I benefit greatly, as does the planet, by not having to spend time driving to and from work.

Female, 50



For more information on active travel, why not follow us on Twitter **@BarnsleyMoving** **#WhatsYourMove** or on Facebook searching Active in Barnsley.

Click here for more information about the Active Travel Hub:

Barnsley Active Travel Hub

Many residents have changed the way they travel during 2020 and have swapped to things like walking and cycling for work and leisure. There are significant benefits of this to individuals, our borough and the planet.

An easy way to describe **active travel** is when you make a journey using your body such as walking, cycling or running. It's really important to our health and wellbeing as it stops us from spending too much time sat down and helps us to move more as part of our everyday life. Active travel is different to us depending on where we live and the lives we lead but there are things that we can all do.

Try walking to your local shops instead of driving, use the stairs instead of lifts, can you walk or cycle on the school run or commit to a regular walk with a friend. In many ways it's about making little changes that have a big impact on us and our communities. By taking up active travel you may benefit by:

- Finding new places to explore and shortcuts in your local area that you didn't know existed.
- Meet new people where you live and help to feel more connected to your community.
- Improving your health, just 30 minutes of walking a day can increase your heart and lung fitness, while reducing the risk of chronic and cardio-vascular disease.
- Helping to lose weight, strengthen your muscles and improve your balance.
- Saving money by reducing the number of car journeys you make.
- Saving you time being active as part of your normal day.
- Helping to contribute to better air quality.
- Helping you to feel better through the sense of achievement, improve your mood and benefit from being outdoors.

In Barnsley we have lots of ways that we are trying to encourage more people to take up active travel:

- We are developing new walking and cycling routes.
- We are working with businesses and schools to help promote and put things in place that will encourage active travel as a viable choice.
- Support is given to schools through the BikeAbility programme helping children to develop skills to be able to cycle safely.
- The Active Travel Hub based in Barnsley town centre can help with free bike checks and advice on active travel routes. The hub offers a free bike hire scheme, including e-bikes, so you could try cycling to work.
- We also have some exciting projects that help people to think about how they make their journeys including the School Streets Project, Beat the Street, WalkWell and our What's Your Move campaign which aims to raise the profile of being active in Barnsley.

Julia's final words

I want to thank everyone who took the time to send in their diary to help give us this unique insight into what life was feeling like for people who live and work in Barnsley on a day in November 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has thrown a grenade into the lives of every single person in Barnsley and I imagine living through the pandemic will have changed all of us for ever.

I'm sure we've all experienced a mixture of the feelings described in this report – sadness, boredom, guilt, isolation, fear but also love, care, hope and connection. For some it has made already difficult lives harder, for others it has brought a new perspective on life and deepened relationships within families and communities. There is no doubt it has had significant effects on our mental health – and for me this is the most enduring theme coming through the diaries. We know this snapshot can't represent how everyone is feeling – and those feelings often change from day to day anyway, but the insights are invaluable and will inform planning and discussion across the council and its partners as we think about the future.

In addition to everything we have covered in the report, one of the things that particularly struck me after reading all the diaries was the importance of relationships – the everyday business of living together and supporting each other through the crisis has strengthened many relationships, but of course we have seen the tragedy when those relationships are torn apart or when people don't have any close relationships in their lives and the loneliness that may bring.

I write this as we are wondering more and more what the future holds. Many of us entered 2021 thinking we were in the final lap over winter before life could get back more to normal. I doubt any of us could describe normal any more, but I am sure we all long for the end of the physical disconnection with family, friends and our social activities.

We are having to accept that we will be living with COVID-19 for much longer than we ever imagined. It will be part of our lives – but I hope it will become something we are increasingly able to manage and to live well with, as we move on from the all-encompassing feeling it gives us now. As we think about our roadmap out of COVID-19 we know there is not one single solution but we'll need to combine a variety of measures to keep it under control – of which vaccination will be a very important one. I know many are balancing hardship and hope, but we do have an opportunity to 'build back fairer,' and that is something we will all be striving for over the next year. And picking up on the theme of Barnsley's legendary community spirit shown in the diaries, there is a strong sense of hope we will continue to look after each other, support each other by continuing to do what we need to do to keep the virus at bay and keep being kind to each other.

I want to finish by saying thank you to the team who have done the excellent work on pulling together this report and more generally - to everyone who works in public health. They have been working flat out for over a year now to serve the people of Barnsley in this unprecedented time. I am so grateful to every single one of them.

Julia Burrows, Director of Public Health

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None of it quite makes sense and I can easily become resentful.

Female, 54

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“

It's a loss of independence he finds frustrating.

Resident talking about her 90 year old father

”

“

I rely on Zoom, email, distant methods of communication, and broadband has become the single most important factor in my day.

Female, 44

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Thank you for reading our report

For more information please contact public health on **01226 773477**
or by emailing us on **publichealth@barnsley.gov.uk**

