

## Covid Conversations with young people with SEND

How has COVID 19 impacted on emotional health and wellbeing?

### What We Did

Over the last year we have communicated with children and young people with SEND and their parent/carers, providing ongoing support during these difficult times. From January – March 2021 we collated this information and engaged with those we support to support them to communicate their thoughts and feelings about the changes to their lives due to COVID-19 and how this has impacted on their emotional well-being. We engaged with 50 children and young people and their families through play and creative activities, one to one conversation through a photography course which helped them to express how they felt.





## Case Studies

### 'Covid is like the rain you don't want to get it on you but it's everywhere'

From weekly one to ones in specialist school setting.

Due to lockdown Ls packed week of various therapies and activities had stopped. L had become unable to stop crying. She said she didn't have a reason, she just felt it in her tummy, and it got too high and came out of her eyes. Every week L would put a rain cloud symbol on her mood board. When asked why she had chosen that she said 'covid is like the rain you don't want to get it on you but its everywhere'

L doesn't believe Covid is real sometimes because 'half the time even mum doesn't know what to believe' and says she sees her mum cry a lot which makes her feel sad.

L said she felt mad and repeatedly said she felt the world was over. She does not like the tummy feeling she gets now.

L thinks life will never be the same but hopes one day she can start her travel training again.

## Case study 2.

### Reciting Quotes from COVID Press Releases

M, Male.

From weekly one to ones in learning environment.

M has become obsessed with reciting quotes he has heard on the COVID press releases. He does not fully understand what is happening, but it has taken over his life. M has taken the guidelines seriously and made it of high importance that he always follows them. M had to stop his PA and his voluntary role during lockdown and really struggled without his routine. M is confident that when everyone has the vaccine that life can resume.

He is not currently able to focus on anything else but the daily updates which is causing disruption to his daily tasks.

As a result, he has high levels of anxiety and is sleeping poorly.

### Case study 3.

#### 'I have to act like someone else at school and it's tiring' Thriving at Home

L. 14, Male.

Recorded before school reopening.

L couldn't be happier in lockdown. He is thriving at home and making improvements. L struggles with the school environment and feels that he has to 'act like someone else at school and its tiring.'

L has become increasingly worried about returning to school. More so than he did before. He doesn't feel like it is fair that he has to go when he has done all his work at home and enjoyed it.

L is enjoying 'fresh air' time with mum and (brother) and said 'I don't know why we never did this before, we do rock painting and hide them, its my favourite game'

L thinks Boris Johnson is 'A very good man' for closing schools and work. He has very little knowledge of Covid and has little interest due.

### Parent/Carer views

- Engaging with young people with SEND about the effects of Covid 19 and associated restrictions also brought with it the opportunity to hear the views of the parents providing care and how the virus has affected them.
- Regular face to face meetings, zoom and phone calls meant BBNW kept in regular contact with 10 sets of parents and the conversations were very interesting.
- One family were forced to shield because of the medical needs of their eldest child. They did as they were told and stayed at home with all 3 children and watched whilst all their support was systematically removed. They had no support for almost 9 months. Mum was providing round the clock care and existing on little more than 2 hours sleep and felt (as many of the parents did) that families with children with SEND had been completely forgotten about.

- Another Mum had seen a resurgence of her anxiety condition which in turn escalated anxiety in her 15 year old daughter leading to night terrors and self-harm. She became incredibly angry that services had been withdrawn and the only support available was one phone call once a week from Social Care and a cascade of work from school.
- Without exception all parents struggled to home school. Most of the children had high levels of support in school which were not available at home and so the pressure of expecting Mum and Dad to then become teachers and the kitchen to become a classroom was for many too big a task. They felt they had been forced into a role that they were not qualified for and so would ultimately fail at and so their children's education would suffer greatly.

***"I am desperately trying to help school my ASD 11 yr old. He has 3 x live lessons a day and I can't keep up - never mind him. We have both ended up in tears for the past 5 days now."***

- Another Mum and Dad were living separately to provide care for their 2 youngest children who both had significant additional needs. School had been their only respite along with both sets of grandparents, which was then removed.
- The project itself showed how vital it was to engage with young people with SEND and their families to provide scaffolding for their declining mental health and wellbeing. As parents of Disabled children ourselves it feels that the effect of the restrictions on those who have additional requirements has not been considered by the decision makers and has been continually ignored throughout consecutive lockdowns.
- Because of the engagement funding and the Covid secure space we have in Bolton we feel that as an organisation we have been able to adapt and be creative to continue to offer support during what has been the most testing of times and provide much needed support.