



From mountain to sea

Aberdeenshire Voices on the Pandemic

Same storm, different boats...



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Aberdeenshire Voices

The Community Impact Assessment report that went to full council on Wednesday 7th October 2020 gave a comprehensive feedback on the online survey and ward meetings which happened – but acknowledged that there was still a need to gather further feedback from harder to reach / easier to ignore groups.

This short report from the CLD Service captures some feedback from less heard voices outlining their experiences of COVID – much of which supports the findings of the CIA Report and in many cases adds lived experience context to some of the findings.

The feedback is grouped to address most of the themes that the Improvement Service identified in their report [‘Poverty, Inequality and Covid 19 – A brief summary of some issues and potential impacts on those living in socio economic disadvantage’](#).

Icons are used throughout the report to identify which themes or communities of interest are reflected in the feedback.

Income and Work		Income and Benefits	
Food Insecurity		Health	
Mental Health		Child Poverty	
Digital Access		Education	
Transport		Economy	
Housing		Vulnerable children	
Vulnerable adults		People with disabilities	
Black and Minority Ethnic		Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers	
Older People		Domestic Abuse	



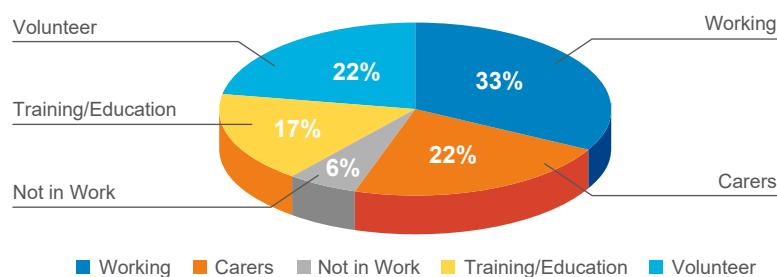
Low Income Households – Local Voices

Over the last few months 23 parents and 45 school age children have participated in an online lived experience forum – Local Voices. All households have an income of less than £15,000 and are from a range of backgrounds including the travelling community, lone parents, households with an adult or child who has a disability, those that have survived domestic violence and those with English as a second language.

The Covid19 lockdown was a very a stressful time for families and the forum gave them an opportunity to express their worries, views and to share their concerns with each other. During the pandemic Local Voices have been used as a sounding board for services which were being adapted to respond to the changing situation.



Lived Experience Forum Members





Food Access

Access to food was an area of concern and the majority of the Local Voices Group asked for direct payments for Free School Meals based on entitlement. The council responded positively and made this change and extended payments to cover holiday periods as well thus addressing the long-standing concerns around holiday hunger.



Larger families found shopping more difficult, especially at the start of the lockdown where sometimes items were only available in limited quantities. Lack of transport meant they were more dependent on local shops which tended to be more expensive.

Community resilience groups were developed across Aberdeenshire in recognition of the need to support ever increasing numbers of people...

"... It was definitely better having the money available to buy food for school meals...."

"To receive £50 a month during lockdown has made an immense difference."

"...Children need fed every day not just when at school and that includes the 13 weeks holidays every year."

"To continue paying this way would be best option as there is no guarantee that children will be well enough physically and mentally to return to school in August."

"Food boxes are also appreciated although they do not include cleaning/ personal hygiene/ laundry products which would help as these can be expensive items to buy..... but it is embarrassing asking for them. I guess I feel I should be able to afford these things."



Home Schooling



The additional costs of home schooling were recognised, especially as households had not planned for this. Families were impacted by the increased demand on their internet and the higher costs of unlimited broadband contracts. It was felt that home resource packs, pens paper, craft materials would have been beneficial alongside the move to digital/blended learning.

- " ...I would have liked to have been able to buy a laptop so that my children could access their work. Not every household has technology and not all technology can access google classrooms. I borrowed money to buy one."
- " ...if everyone had the ability to access Internet ... School work needing to be done at home takes up printer ink and paper which costs a lot ... "
- " The school have been good with my daughter. My daughter did not respond to the Glow programme, so we let her teacher know who was very good about it & she made her up a schoolwork package more tailored to my daughter. So that was helpful."
- " ...My daughter already needs extra help in school, and this has been lacking since we have been home schooling."
- " After trying to do online learning with my daughter since March & failing as she is dyslexic, she required proper teaching by a qualified teacher rather than a dyslexic mother..."

The households in the Local Voices group that were most affected by Covid19 were

- households that were in rural areas with more than 3 children.
- lone parents
- households that included children and adults with a disability.

Connect with other parents in Aberdeenshire through the Facebook Group – [Parents Come Together in Aberdeenshire](#).





Voices from a care home

One group that has been greatly affected by lockdown has been older people - especially those in care homes.



Residents in Edenholme Care Home took part in several sessions with CLD staff to talk about their experience and feelings over the past 6 months.



One resident said, *"the main difference between then and now is that there are no visitors"* For one resident the experience has been hard...



" I feel restricted in many things, a feeling of confinement, living behind four walls."

The poem below was created in an interactive process with residents

Click
here to
hear
audio



What I don't like

In general

I don't like screeching seagulls at night keeping me awake

I don't like spooky castles at night

Nobody likes spiders and beetles!

I hate stormy weather – it really scares me

I don't dislike anything – things grow on me

I don't like tripe and potted meat

I don't like people quoting from newspapers

I don't like slugs and caterpillars

Or spiders

In lockdown

I don't like lockout doors

I don't like not seeing family for weeks

I don't like sweaty masks

I don't like masks muffling words

I don't like masks because they're frightening

I don't like all the lockdown repeats on TV

but

In particular I don't like spiders creeping up walls



Click
here to
hear
audio



What I like (and what I've missed)...

*I'm not quite sure what I like
I like to read poetry and history
I used to like going walking and cycling
I like but I miss the entertainment we
had
I like to see my daughter and son
We like our grandchildren's faces
I like red strawberries and ice cream
I like sunshine on the backs of mallard
ducks
And finally, I like happy faces*



For some residents the experience of the lack of control has reminded them of what they went through in the 2nd World War as young children. One said it was like the experience of the bombing raids launched on Aberdeen from Norway in the war: *'I didn't understand it but I remember the apprehension... It had a lasting impression and that's 70 years ago'.*

Keeping in touch has been important. As well as phones and letters residents have been staying in touch with family and friends by using video chat on tablets that were provided by the council

Staying in touch and informed about the bigger picture was important to one resident: *'Knitting, crocheting, painting is all very lovely but we mustn't forget the world outside, and that's why politics is important'.* Some of the group were keen to have more opportunities to make these broader connections.

There was an acceptance from one resident that sometimes there is maybe not much you can do these bigger events and issues

" Whatever your feelings there comes a time when you have to go with the flow because you have very little influence...but you can still be involved...this is important as you're not alone."

Illustrations – Sunniva Caro

Poetry facilitation
and narration – Alistair Lawrie



Voices from the Recovery Community

The main CIA report identified increased alcohol consumption during lockdown as one of the emerging trends in Aberdeenshire. The risks associated with this are obviously significantly greater for those who already had a problematic relationship with alcohol directly or indirectly. So how did the Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (ADP) Community Forums respond ?

In the case of the ADP Forums the approach was to make the **transition to digital services** to try and maintain connections. Funding was secured from the Aberdeenshire Council Resilience Fund which was a quick and flexible process which paid for tablets and wi-fi connections for community members who were digitally excluded. Services and support groups moved online – and to the surprise of many proved to be highly effective.

" Greater number of people been able to access online meetings and groups as don't have to travel, especially from rural areas."

" Been a God-send for lockdown, these meetings are like having people in your house, all the activities, even recovery groups been 3 meetings a week."

" Group weekly online chats – helps to share feelings and fears with people in the same situation who understand. Also, important to connect with local people rather than unknown people online."

Many community members reported increased attendance at sessions when they moved online – the only exception was a Family Support Group where attendance dropped significantly – which members think is because

" .it is difficult for some people to speak online from home as other family members may hear."

Community members are looking forward to the time when they can physically meet again but see a continued role for online support as well in the future.

**The best antidote to addiction
is community and connection.**

Michaela Jones, Scottish Recovery Consortium

This Thursday 8th Oct at 3pm at
the weekly Zoom check in:

Open conversation:

Join in and share
your views and
ideas

All
Welcome!

poverty

- ⇒ What does that mean to you?
- ⇒ Is there a connection between poverty and addiction?
- ⇒ What can be done in communities to challenge poverty?

Your conversation host:
Diane Ord for the ADP

Zoom Link for joining the conversation:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89500333275?pwd=OHhMRXZkQlFmUmpSVmFyNDQ3SU9uUT09>
Meeting ID: 895 0033 3275
Passcode: 2w55em

Programme for other Aberdeenshire online activities throughout poverty week here:
<https://www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk/our-priorities/tackling-poverty-inequalities/aberdeenshire-challenging-poverty-week-2020/>

#ChallengePoverty
#TogetherWeCan

aberdeenshire
alcohol & drug
partnership

Community Member Feedback

Click to play.

Community Voices - Equalities Focus Group

A focus group and follow up discussions took place to feed back to the Scottish Renewal Advisory Board who were interested in understanding how Covid 19 had impacted on the range of protected characteristics in the Equality Act.



I went through lots of different feelings. Denial at the start (this is only a two- week thing) through to anger at feeling I couldn't do things. I think it made the challenges of being a lone parent of a teenager with additional support needs even harder – and lonelier. The funny thing is a bit of me liked that other folk were experiencing the same things – almost – 'now you know what it feels like'



It was difficult not to be able to go "shifting" or travelling as we normally do around springtime. Also, not able to get work as we as a community are mostly self-employed doing landscape, roofing, etc. and not able to get out and about to do this. Also, people didn't have the same money to get this type of work done or were doing it themselves as on furlough.



I found having a baby during this time to have some positives. I feel that it has made it easier to bond with my baby and to have the time and space to do that. I could concentrate on breast feeding without lots of visitors. My partner was furloughed so it has been great for him to have the time with the baby as well.



I know of persons who needed support for domestic violence and although had telephone support from Women's Aid, there were no local refuges to go to. My own older daughter was walking in the rain with the pram to keep away from her partner. As a mother my instinct was to allow her into my flat for safety and shelter, but my daughter was stressed about breaking lockdown rules.



I support lots of people with poor mental health and reckon over 80% of the people who use our foodbank have a mental health condition...I think support for mental health is bad anyway and Covid just helped to illustrate that even more.



My husband is back working now but it looks like his furlough pay is now his actual pay which is a pay cut – also loss of holidays and overtime payments. These things will have an impact on lots of people when furlough ends, and we need to look out for the weakest who will be most affected.



It is important to ensure that the commonly used mantra 'We're all in this together' doesn't mean that our response fails to understand that the impact will be more severe on those who are living in poverty or close to it.



I spoke to an elderly lady who was shielded and caring for her husband with dementia. I noticed her going out to the local shop and offered to organise this for her but she said she had to get out of the house for her own sanity – and also, if she caught Covid she might end up in hospital and get a break – which showed how difficult her day to day life is.



Lockdown triggered a lot of anxiety and though I kept in touch with mental health and learning disability nurses online it wasn't the same. I had a good, trusted friend who has called me every day to check on me.



There are lots of different vulnerable groups – but the focus seemed to be more on older shielded people. As soon as lockdown began, The Child Maintenance Service stopped chasing unpaid maintenance, as staff employed by DWP were deployed to process the influx of Universal Credit claims. My income dropped £300 per month during lockdown due to no maintenance paid.



One of the things that would have helped us if some of the messages could have been made simpler – with easy read versions. I had to ask our support worker what the R number meant. We would have liked clear dates and timelines for when we can meet again.



We don't drive, so shopping was hard to get at the start as it was only expensive stuff left, so our food bills almost doubled, with less cash. We used our community more though, lots of walks which were a godsend, made you realise how nice an area we live in.



It was a huge bonus receiving £50 direct payment, monthly from Aberdeenshire Council to cover costs of free school lunch entitlement and the fact it carries in throughout summer holidays made a positive difference.





New Scots and Volunteers

The Covid 19 crisis threw up several issues for the Syrian New Scots community. Some people experienced isolation, restricted access to shops and activities, money worries and so on. These were compounded by poor English language skills, a lack of a wider community network and little family support. The volunteer-run group Friends of Amal and the New Scots run Al-Amal Project were proactive in tackling these issues.

Al-Amal sought funding and provided every family with a tablet or laptop so that they could access schoolwork and other information online. Previously people had been using their phones which were not sufficient for a family needing access to school/work etc.

Friends of Amal began weekly social chat groups between New Scots women and volunteers. Meetings happen on Zoom - which was new to everybody at the time. The meetings developed from being a general chat to something more structured, where integration and ESOL practise is seen as a key outcome – with key partner the WEA supporting.

These weekly chats have developed into structured sessions where volunteers and resettled women share recipes from home such as homemade yoghurt, falafels, or oatcakes - then someone will tell a story or poem. There are also breakout room sessions where the larger group breaks into smaller groups to discuss a theme. This is great for practising English, getting to know each other, and developing friendships and learning about each other's cultures.

The whole experience has been a learning curve for everyone involved, attendees are encouraged to make short films (which has meant learning some technical skills) and share them with the group.



- " We very much enjoy this group."*
- " English, Arabic, it's perfect in every way!
Recipes, stories, I enjoy it so much."*
- " Even if I don't understand everything, I enjoy
it because we are here together."*

The group is going from strength to strength and is looking at starting an equivalent Men's Social Chat Zoom group. Friends of Amal are also about to apply for funding to do a Mum's Group Story Pack, a project which they also plan to do online.

Jackie, the Chair of Friends of Amal said:

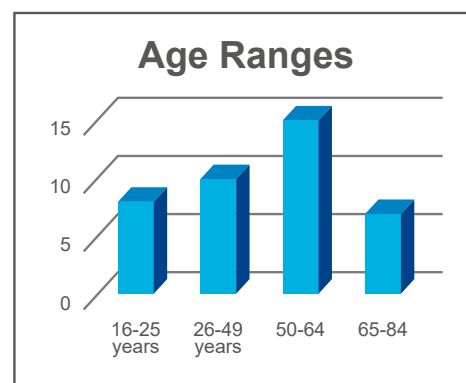
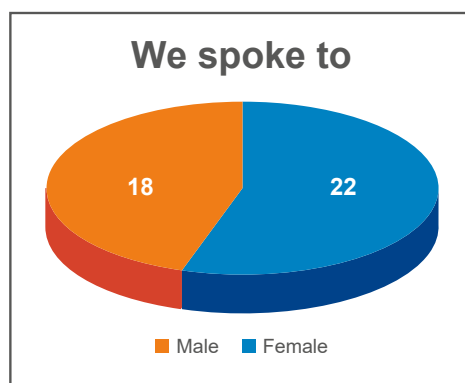
- " There have been some real positives come out of the
need to go online. People from any part of Aberdeenshire
can meet online without the need for travel."*
- " I think that it might still be worth continuing with online
events even after COVID is no longer an issue because
of the way it allows folks from different places to meet.
Also, I wonder if during the winter some folks will prefer
to meet online rather than going out in bad weather."*
- " I think those of us who have been attending various
online events have got to know each other better and
so we have continued to build our community."*





Street Conversations

Over the first Week of September 2020 we engaged with 40 semi randomly selected individuals across four towns: Aboyne, Huntly, Banff & Macduff. Interviewees were approached in public areas where social distancing allowed.



Support

" I didn't know about the Assistance Hub but knew about Mid Deeside as I usually use their bus, feel very lucky to have that support network."

Female 64 Retired

" We know more people than ever, more communication than in 20 years of living in the area."

Huntly Female 55, Male 56, both Retired

" It's actually been good to get a break from supporting the family and grandkids although it has been nice to see them again."

Female 74 Banff, Working

" I admit it was really hard home schooling two children and working. I had zero time to myself. It was really hard, exhausting.' ... 'I appreciated getting out on more walks and I've kept up being more active' ... 'Also, the good community spirit in Huntly helped."

Female 39, Working,

" I've loved it as we haven't had a ready routine, and I was always late for school anyway. Home schooling has been ok, but I've struggled with having the kids myself as there has been so little to do. Money has been tight; the school meal payments were lifesavers as without it the kids wouldn't eat as much."

Mum aged 22



“ My daughter got a phone call early on because she was shielding, asking about resuscitation and thing. I know they have to do it, but it made it quite scary.’ ... ‘ It was really hard for them especially when things started to open up and they still couldn’t go out. The children are 11 and 14yrs, it’s better now the schools are back. I have an older one who is starting college and that is worrying’

**Female 68 Retired who has a daughter
Shielding at home with two children**

“ Rural Internet connection not good enough to work from home, this is a known issue’ ... ‘fortunately employed by Aberdeenshire Council who have been flexible so I could access an office. It was easy to organise, no problems’

**Female 50yrs, Aberdeenshire
Council Employee**

“ ‘I’ve found lockdown hard. I’ve juggled childcare and work and supporting friends who had ill children. Home-schooling has been most difficult as English is not my first language and there hasn’t been a lot of support or information from the school. How do they expect parents to keep up with the home schooling as well as trying to learn it themselves?’

**Female, Employed,
Mum of one, aged 32**

“ It’s hard wearing a mask all day and some of the public are not wearing masks but it’s difficult to do anything about it. You don’t know people’s circumstances; you have to assume they could have health problems or mental health problems. Everyone needs to shop’ ... ‘It’s a bit like me getting stopped at an airport because I don’t ‘look’ British. I learn to accept it, what can you do, but I understand you can’t tell someone’s individual circumstance by just looking’

Male, 60yrs, Huntly, Employed Supermarket

“ I would usually go to the library for help with my phone or tablet accessing services. Right now, I want to change energy providers and I haven’t managed’ ... ‘A bit of a concern is we’ll never get that service again. People my age are lost without it’

Male 74yrs Retired, Aboyne missing the library service

“ ... but want the council office to open so I can pay my bills! They are really nice on the phone but can’t take my payment because of GDPR and I can’t get on with talking to a machine. I’ve tried, I’ve really really tried and still haven’t managed. Now just waiting to be told I need to pay extra.’

Male 62yrs Banff, Farm Worker.



Employment/Economy

" Couldn't do the apprenticeship I had planned because of Covid so I had to totally rethink Getting jobs is also difficult generally just now. Also, the trains 50% timetable makes things more difficult. Even getting here (Huntly) for driving lesson.' ... 'I'm feeling more hopeful now because I've got a place at college. It wasn't what I'd planned but at least I'm doing something. It's still all a bit of a concern, I mean the future generally, but you've got to be hopeful'

Male 17 Inch & Huntly.

" I have real worries about the economy and about finding work, I'm desperate to find something before October but it's really hard. I appreciate I have the option to stay with my parents and it could be worse... When I graduate, I worry that I'll be competing against much more experienced people and that first step is going to be really difficult...I feel annoyed and worried that our teaching is all online this year, with no choice.'

**Male Student 24 3rd Year Aberdeen Uni Student
(Currently staying at home with parents)**

" We have changed our market from 80% export/20% home to 60-70% export/ 30-40%home. We've overall grown our business with bigger companies struggling.' ... 'the industry overall is a shambles but we've managed to do well because we're a small business and could adapt to customers needs'

**Female 54 Runs Seafood Processing
Family Business Fraserburgh**

" Business is not good, had support but still difficult, I have staff on furlough, but I think I'll have to lay people off. It's difficult, that's not good'

Male 55 Taxi Business Owner

Conclusions

This report has captured some of the different experiences of people regarding the pandemic in Aberdeenshire. The sub- title of the report refers to the oft quoted phrase attributed to the writer Damian Barr that “We are not all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm.’

Some of the information gathered has come from specific groups who are less likely to be heard in consultations such as older people in care homes and others from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. What they all have in common is that they are from groups within our communities that were identified by the Improvement Service at the start of the pandemic as those most likely to be affected negatively as a result of already existing inequality factors.

There have been many good examples where communities have come together to meet local needs. The local authority and other partners have been very responsive in the way they have actively sought to provide support through things like the Grampian Assistance Hub and the distribution of computer and IT equipment through the Connecting Scotland programme. Parents in the lived experience group have acknowledged the significant positive impact that the decision to pay school meal allowances directly to bank accounts has had on them – one clear example of an improvement to the seaworthiness of the boat that many were in whilst trying to weather the storm.

Young people voices have been heard in this process too, but it is worth reflecting on the magnitude of their experiences – from uncertainty around exam results and future career options through to the challenges of home schooling. Members of Aberdeenshire Youth Forums spoke to local Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament to share some of their thoughts. They mentioned things like

- Some young people with disabilities felt that the pandemic had made it harder for them to access education and support.
- Young people missed social interaction with their peers most – and some commented on missing the support of individual teachers.
- The experience of working from home varied – some young people enjoying it, others finding it difficult and others seeing benefits in a genuine blending of home and school.
- Young people do worry about catching Covid and bringing it back into their households.
- Young people recognise the importance of mental health and well-being in themselves and their peers.

Mental health and well-being is a recurring theme throughout this report - and reflects the experiences of people in the earlier stages of the pandemic. As we move into 2021 and a new vaccine it is important that we continue to reach out to those in our communities who will continue to be impacted most in the readjustment period and beyond.

Some people who have had the virus have experienced enduring symptoms – so called Long Covid. In Aberdeenshire we must be aware of the scarring effects on people's lives and how these are not borne equally across our communities.

December 10 was World Human Rights Day –and Aberdeenshire Council recognised that...

" This year's theme relates to the COVID-19 pandemic and focuses on the need to build back better by ensuring Human Rights are central to recovery efforts. We will reach our common global goals only if we are able to create equal opportunities for all, address the failures exposed and exploited by COVID-19, and apply human rights standards to tackle entrenched, systematic, and intergenerational inequalities, exclusion and discrimination"

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