

## Week 17 – 'Kind of Lockdown'

**'I believe the generosity and solidarity in action in the present moment, offers a foreshadowing of what is possible - and necessary. The basic generosity and empathy of most ordinary people should be regarded as a treasure, a light and an energy source that can drive a better society, if it is recognised and encouraged.'**

### **Rebecca Solnit 2020**

The end of this week marks the official end of a school term that has been like no other ever experienced in our lifetimes. It is usually a time of much celebration within our school community, with endings and goodbyes, tears and laughter and gorgeously attired Year 13's having their 'day at the races'. Staff and students alike - demob happy with buckets and spades at the ready. But for now – the celebrations have largely become virtual, rather than physical ones and there is a different vibe about this term end, combined with an unclear indistinct outline of a future which at times may seem hard to picture.

A staggering 17 weeks ago - almost overnight, our everyday lives became a shadow of what we had known from even the week before.... and we were in lockdown. We had to adapt - and quickly. For some who may have already been struggling with their mental health prior to the pandemic, Covid19 served to well and truly shake the foundations, offering a new depth of challenges to address. When I wrote my first blog what seems like an eternity ago now, I (possibly like you) had little idea of just how confusing a time it would be. Of just how our individual experiences may unfold and indeed what toll the rolling weeks of social isolation, may have on ourselves and importantly on that of our young people.

But we **have** got through it this far and SGHS has done **the** most remarkable job in making sure that our young people have continued to have uninterrupted access to their teaching and learning and to exceptional pastoral support. But now it is time for a break for our Summer holidays – to hopefully recharge, to play, to relax, to have fun and maybe reflect on what the heck has just happened over the last four months! For many of us our original holiday plans may have changed and be put on hold until safer times ahead – which we hold out high hopes they will be there again one day. For now, we continue to be creative of what we can do and where we can go, and we carry on getting through it as we have been doing. By adapting and being resilient, and by supporting each other as we go – common themes from my previous ramblings.

I guess it was really in today's 'pop up' blog that I wanted to be forward looking in preparation not only for getting through the next 7 weeks, but to September and our collective return to school. I am mindful less so, of focusing not on the impact of losing 5 months of physical schooling and socialising in our child's lives, but more so on how we and they can continue/begin to value the other aspects of life that have come to the fore during this transformative experience. Of not thinking how things will go back to the old 'normal', but how we can all contribute to what lies ahead in the 'new next' (Dr Kensa Gunte 2020 coined this phrase).

We as individuals and as a collective are responsible for shaping this 'new next'. Our young people's lives whilst halted in their familiar tracks 17 weeks ago, have been enriched not by

the physical experiences from being in school, but by witnessing human endeavours of adversity and resilience within our neighbourhoods and communities. In caring for our loved ones and forging deeper relationships with family members and neighbours, we have hopefully paid homage to just how nourishing and wholesome a supportive, cohesive home and community can be. We have developed newfound levels of empathy and creativity and found alternate ways of being, whilst each coping with daily challenges, beset by the force that is Covid19. We have gone back to the grass roots of humanity almost and witnessed people being the very best version of themselves, in their shared pursuit to conquer a wretched virus.

For the most part we were all forced to slow down our busy lives and in doing so it offered us a greater opportunity to practise a sensitivity and deeper understanding of mental health and wellbeing, that we often ill afford ourselves and others in 'real life'. I know for me during this time, my emotions did not follow a clear pathway. Rather one day I felt calm, energised and motivated with positive intent to delve into my ultimate origami for beginner's kit 😊 and on another - possibly isolated and sapped of energy, with little desire to even undertake the basic tasks. I experienced this emotional Covid rollercoaster with the young people I worked with too and I feel privileged to now see them emerging from this shared trauma, with heightened levels of empathy and strength and self-belief.

It may well be that I am looking very naively at a vision of a 'new next', which I hope is to be fundamentally enriched by the acts of kindness and empathic responses to ourselves and each other, that we saw blossoming during the pandemic. The opening quote in this blog is from Rebecca Solnit, an author and contemporary historian. She points out that '.....what I have seen after earlier disasters is that a lot of people aspire to "go home" and "back to normal", but some find in the moment a sense of self and a sense of connection so meaningful, that something about who they were and what they did in the crisis carries forward into how they live the rest of their life.'

I remain dedicated to helping young people and I truly believe that by looking not at what we have lost during lockdown - but what we have gained, it is **they** that will be the founders and models of how to make a difference in the 'new next'. So, it is on this note that I will sign off and bid you a good summer. I had never written a blog before lockdown, let alone felt able to share writings in a public forum, so please note they have merely been my thoughts and my attempt at having a go at doing something different and challenging myself. I know it has helped me try and find some clarity during this rocky time and my hope is that maybe it may have helped you too. Stay safe and well.

Anna McQuade

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For a counselling appointment with Anna in September please contact [time2talk@sghs.org.uk](mailto:time2talk@sghs.org.uk) and to catch up with Mabel - she remains busy @mabels.tails on Instagram