

Citizens Rising

Listening to and learning from young people through The Lookout



RELATIONSHIPS
PROJECT

2022

Catriona Maclay

relationshipsproject.org

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THANKS

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The Relationships Project

At [The Relationships Project](#) we believe that everything works better when relationships are valued; people are happier and healthier, and businesses and services are more effective and efficient. That's why it's our mission is to make it easier for every organisation, service and individual to put relationships at the heart of what they do.

WELCOME TO THE LOOKOUT

The Lookout is a dedicated space for children and young people to make sense of the effect that the pandemic has had on their relationships. We invited them to share with a panel of 'Chief Listeners' what they'd like to see change to make sure that our society's recovery from the pandemic takes into account the hopes, dreams and needs of young people.

In early March 2020 - when the spread of coronavirus gathered pace - we set up the [Relationships Observatory](#), an open space for members of our network and beyond to collectively make sense of the effect of Covid on our relationships. The insights and learning from this space have shaped our work since, focusing our attention on what we need to do now to be able to look back on the Covid years as a time when we not only helped one another in a crisis, but as a time when we changed for good.

Through The Observatory, we met the 'disaster crew' - Neil Denton, Lucy Easthope and other 'disasterologists' who reminded us that, in a conventional disaster, the needs of children are put first.

In the Covid disaster, the needs of young people have been something of an afterthought; decisions about life-shaping grades were made at the last minute, important life events were forced behind closed doors or cancelled all together, and formative experiences were placed on hold.

In partnership with the Summer of Play, we set up [The Lookout](#), a sister space to The Observatory designed specifically to hear from children and young people about how the pandemic has been for them, how it's affected their relationships, and what they feel needs to change to ensure that their needs are taken into account in the next stages of the pandemic and beyond.

We created resources to support young people to reflect on different elements of their experiences. These included [a guided meditation](#) and [a session plan with suggested activities](#). The resources created as part of The Lookout will remain freely available to use. We encourage teachers and play leaders to continue to use and adapt these resources for the young people and the context that you are working in.

There were a number of ways in which young people could get involved in The Lookout:



INDIVIDUALLY,
ONLINE

Young people were invited to take their very own trip to The Lookout by listening to the guided meditation then sharing what they saw through a simple online form.



IN GROUPS,
ONLINE

We hosted a number of Zoom sessions with groups of young people where we listened to the guided meditation and discussed experiences together.



IN GROUPS,
OFFLINE

We created a simple session guide for adults who work with young people, supporting them to run Lookout sessions with their groups, then share back the key themes.

▲ MAKING SENSE OF OUR DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS

Many of the themes we heard about from young people were familiar. There was fear, loss and isolation. And there was intense gratitude for relationships that remained strong. As for all of us, young people's wider network of relationships shrank dramatically to the most intimate family circles. Yet this created a particularly unusual situation for young people, who have less freedom to choose their intimate relationships, greater dependence on their families, and less well established relationships in the outer spheres.

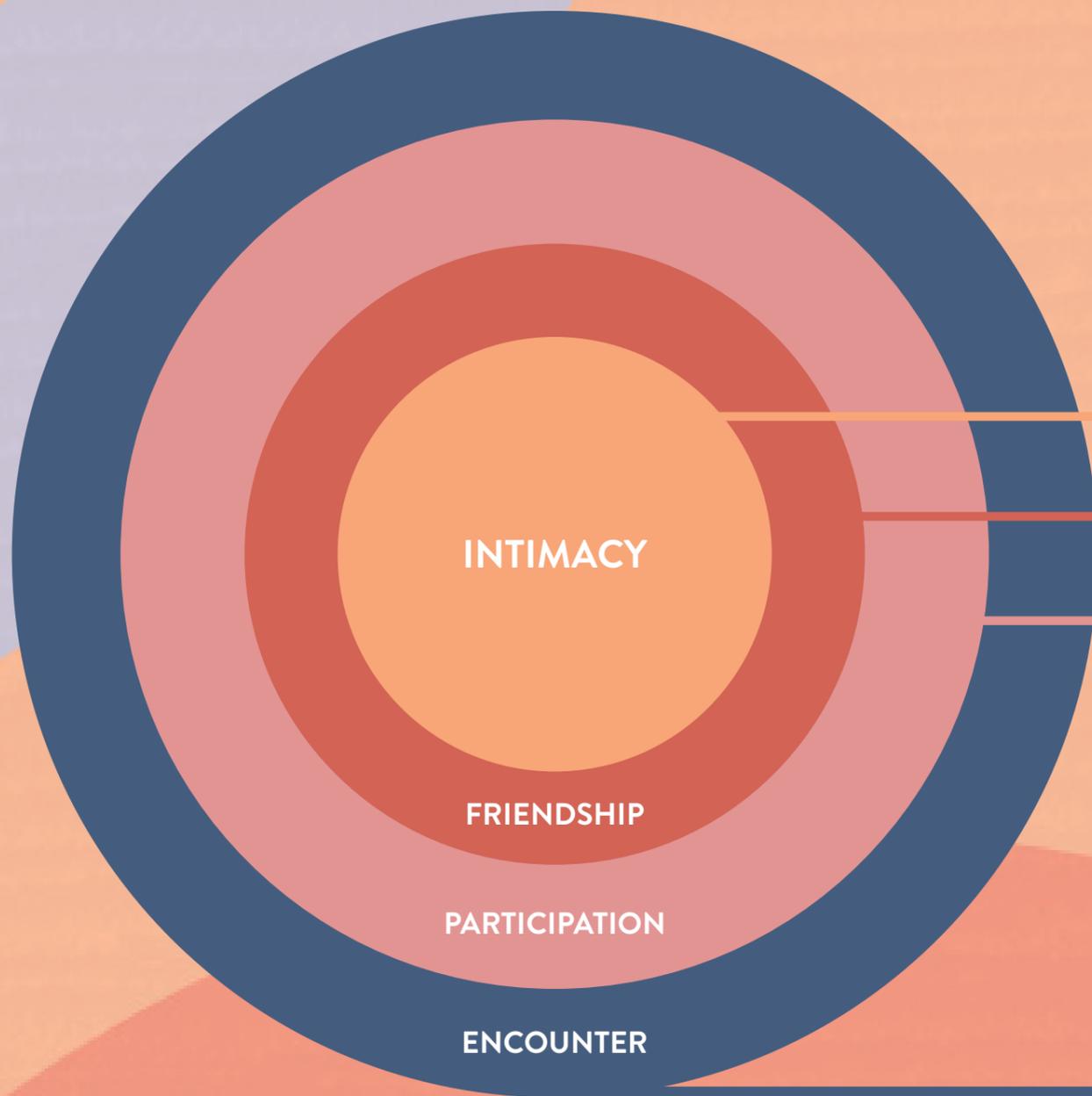
We often think about our personal relationships as a series of relationship rings (see next page), with our most intimate relationships at the centre broadening out to less familiar - but still important - relationships with neighbours, teachers, youth workers, and society more broadly.

Through our wider work, we've heard how having relationships across all of these rings helps us to navigate life and make our way through the various challenges that we meet along the way. This framework resonated in the stories and responses that we heard from young people.



“ Being isolated away from other people, it's like we lost a year of our youth that we will never get back. The past year was the year that we could've started to begin developing our own freedom and exploring life.”

– Lookout Contributor



The people we live with

Lockdown intensified the importance of a small number of family contacts, and loosened the bonds with the wider network of contacts and role models that young people would normally have. Where young people had strong relationships with their intimate family, these offered a vital buffering force for which young people were intensely grateful. And where they were missing, the results were devastating.

Of course every individual experience is different, and young people were keen to remind us of how diverse their perspectives were. We have used young people's words to tell their own stories, supplementing with our observations, and occasionally the perspectives of other adults. Core to the project has been a commitment from adults to listen, and we are very grateful to our panel of "Chief Listeners" for their participation in the project. You will see their responses to young people at the end of this report.

The people we're friends with

The people we know or interact with

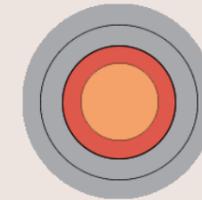
The murkiest territory was in the middle rings. Young people's developing relationships with each other - and adults - were suddenly cut-off, and are redeveloping along new paths. Often the adults with responsibility for young people have been under huge pressure, and themselves in need of additional support. Recovery for young people will involve helping them to repopulate all of their relationship rings with both old and new bonds. In addition to any educational goals, enabling those relational experiences must be part of adult society's commitment to young people.

Our interactions with wider society

Perhaps the most interesting trend we heard was the flourishing of new connections and identities in the outer rings. Where young people might have otherwise been slowly forming their perspectives on civic life at large, these relationships were thrust into the foreground. What is our responsibility to others? Do social institutions step up when we most need help? What kind of a society do we want to live in? Young people were forced into dramatic, society-wide confrontation with these questions. For some, they had the time and space to get involved in social issues for the first time. Many had formative experiences, or developed new opinions, which are likely to shape their perspectives for many years to come.



SOURCES OF STRENGTH, SOURCES OF CHALLENGE



The young people who took part in The Lookout consistently told us about the importance of the family that they live with and the friends that are closest to them. We heard how these relationships were a source of strength and joy, and something that they felt intensely grateful for.

We heard that the challenges that young people have been facing over the last couple of years have been much more varied. Ranging from fear for the safety of loved ones to the mental health of their friends and the challenge of socialising once again, it's clear that young people have had a lot to contend with.



WHO HAS BEEN IMPORTANT TO YOU?

In asking young people who had been important to them through the pandemic, they overwhelmingly told us about the family and friends at the centre of their relationship rings. For some, these most intimate bonds got stronger. We heard plenty of positive experiences and even happy memories.

My Mum. I would have been lost without her, I would have not known what to do with myself.

– Lookout Contributor

[The most important relationship for me has been] my mom with my anxiety.

– Lookout Contributor

Some [of my friends] became even closer because of social media. I would talk to my friends online and even call them which helped to keep our relationships stable

– Lookout Contributor

My friends- any time I have doubts, mainly about if I am good enough or whether everyone likes me, they are always there to reassure me.

– Lookout Contributor

There was this time where we played in the garden jumping on a mattress. It was really fun.

– Lookout Contributor



WHO HAS BEEN IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Whilst less frequent, there were important mentions of sources of support outside the immediate circles of family and friends. Some of these were professionals, including teachers and therapists. Some young people found new and important online communities.

My teachers honestly have been my biggest form of support throughout the pandemic despite being separated physically.

– Lookout Contributor

My grandma became very important. We knew Covid affected old people more than young people. Everything we did we had to question it. We had to double check everything we did for my grandma's sake.

– Lookout Contributor

I joined YesFam (an online community focused on stepping outside your comfort zone and saying “yes” to positive experiences). I have made amazing friends in the community, and met people who love adventure and meeting new people just as much as I do. The community has given me love, friendship, and the most amazing amount of confidence in myself.

– Lookout Contributor

I've lost too many people in my life and I want to hang on to those who are special to me this year.

– Lookout Contributor



WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN WORRIED ABOUT?

Where sources of strength and support were often similar to adults', accounts of the challenges were more diverse. Young people reported many of the same trends of loneliness, change and uncertainty that we have heard from adults. Some of these experiences are a normal part of childhood, although many

more young people will have been touched by them. But we also heard of the unnatural prevalence of fear in young people's experiences - of death, bereavement and loss. We also heard about the diverse experiences of different groups of young people which haven't received much attention elsewhere.

We were worried and scared. Many people we know had Covid. People passed away. Not knowing what was going on was really scary. It was daunting.

- Lookout Contributor

Serving parents (i.e. armed forces) were deployed to provide pandemic support. Children and young people were concerned about their safety, and this was less recognised than if parent was a nurse in the NHS for instance. Between changing deployments and quarantine requirements, there was lots of uncertainty about if a parent would be stuck somewhere and not be able to come home.

- Lookout Contributor (Adult)

I really felt for kids with abusive parents. They were being told to stay at home.

- Lookout Contributor

Everyone should wear see-through masks (so that deaf people like this participant can still lip-read).

- Lookout Contributor

Real fear that I hadn't experienced before about my parents. I saw reports about loads of doctors dying, particularly from ethnic minorities. This was before the vaccine. I was worried that one of them would get Covid.

- Lookout Contributor



WHAT THINGS HAVE YOU FOUND HARDEST?

Young people often spoke about friends and peers who they are worried about. Many young people told us about mental health struggles, either their own or those of other

people. Young people and adults frequently mourned for lost rituals, like the ending of school years or the beginning of student life.

Having to pretend like everything is ok.

- Lookout Contributor

Some people would have a joyous mood in school but online I thought they seemed really low and down. I think the stress of work and not interacting with people made their mental health go down.

- Lookout Contributor

Accessing mental health support was probably the hardest thing to do throughout the year. There are definitely some things that were available but they can only go so far. For someone who is really struggling, being on their own and only communicating through a phone made it easier to feel alone and cut off from even your closest friends.

- Lookout Contributor

Things going back to normal. Before the first lockdown I used to socialise everywhere I went but after the lockdowns I have found it hard to return to my normal bubbly self.

- Lookout Contributor

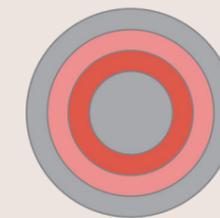
It was really annoying to miss the end of year 6. Every other year goes on a big trip in years 5 and year 6, and it got cancelled in year 5, and then cut short in year 6. I think I cried a little.

- Lookout Contributor

Amidst the richness and diversity of individual perspectives, we heard three big themes that echoed through young people's experiences:

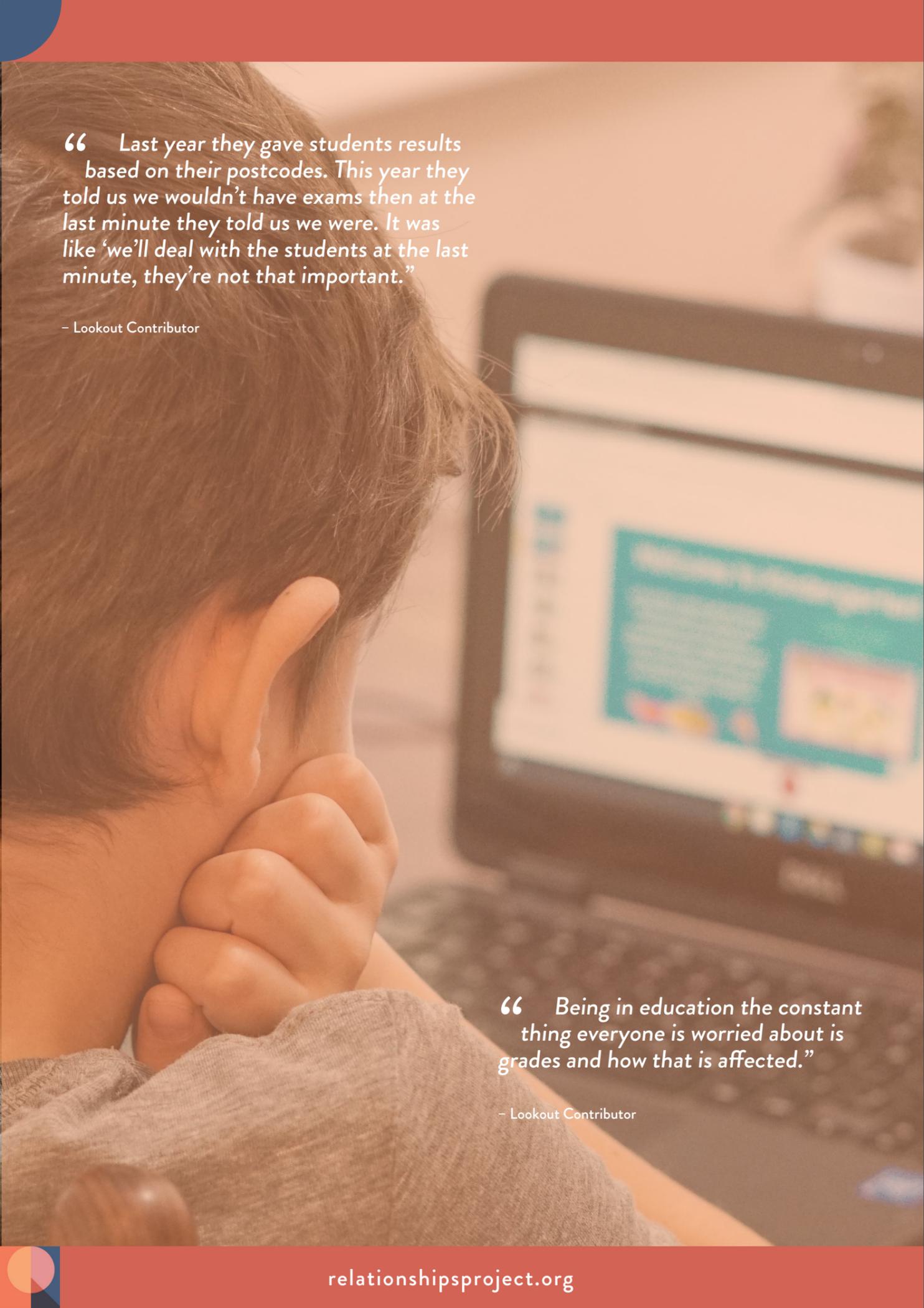
1. Education as a cliff edge
2. The role of adults
3. Relationships with society

EDUCATION AS A CLIFF EDGE



Especially for young people at secondary school, education was spoken about almost entirely in a context of stress and pressure.

Going to school and college normally involves a rich range of relationships. We noticed that for many children, the pandemic seemed to have fractured some of the normal “participation” relationships we would expect them to have with teachers, youth workers etc. For many, the effect of online schooling was to strip educational experiences back to a high-stakes question of exams. There was an urgent feeling that their whole future was at risk - and that last-minute changes to exam rules and school arrangements have only made things worse.



“ Last year they gave students results based on their postcodes. This year they told us we wouldn’t have exams then at the last minute they told us we were. It was like ‘we’ll deal with the students at the last minute, they’re not that important.’”

– Lookout Contributor

“ Being in education the constant thing everyone is worried about is grades and how that is affected.”

– Lookout Contributor

“ I just wish the school could see how stressed I am.”

– Lookout Contributor

Not being around their friends made the situation worse. Teachers were sometimes seen as a source of support, and sometimes of pressure.

“ 60% of the pressure to study is from teachers telling us we have to catch up on what we’ve missed. 40% is me putting pressure on myself, thinking if I don’t study I won’t do well next year. Teachers are telling us we can’t relax this summer, we need to get ready for next year.”

– Lookout Contributor

We suspect that these genuine pressures were further exacerbated as the relationships associated with day-to-day schooling were undermined.

We know that relationships play a vital buffering effect to stress and challenge.

We heard professionals talking about the importance of creating “low stakes” check-ins with young people. And yet distance learning - and then

the ongoing pressures on schools - will have strained the relationship capacity of both the individuals and institutions at the heart of education (see also page 30).

“ I will see that young people are very tired and when I speak to them about it, they tell me what they’ve done this week in terms of how many after-school interventions and clubs and things like that they have. And it’s a lot.”

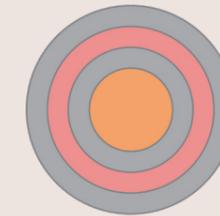
– Lookout Contributor (Adult)

We ourselves noticed many young people’s reluctance to turn on their cameras on Zoom, making it much harder to understand what they were thinking and feeling. We heard concern from adults that a narrow focus on catching up on learning was squeezing out other important experiences.

We would like to see adult society working with young people to alleviate this desperate sense of “all or nothing” catch-up. This will involve supporting young people - but also supporting the adults who hold critical relationships with young people.



THE ROLE OF ADULTS



The Lookout heard primarily from young people, but we also spoke to parents and professionals (teachers, youth workers etc.). The intersection between youth and adult perspectives told a story in itself.

Threaded throughout the submissions from both sides was the power of adults to shape, translate, mitigate or magnify young people's experiences. Young people's dependence on adults comes into sharper focus in a crisis.

Adults had a key role in explaining and interpreting experiences. We heard stories - from both adults and children - about adults helping make sense of the pandemic, whether at an individual or community level.

Many young people were acutely aware of the pressure on the adults in their lives, and very grateful they had these people to help them through.

“ Mum (was) always willing to explain what is going on.”

- Lookout Contributor

“ You can see groups of children from certain schools, and they just seem to have more of an ability to talk about these things. It’s an empathetic way where it just feels like they have had more practice at it.”

- Lookout Contributor (Adult)

Sometimes we heard about this translation role missing, or that the support wasn’t what was needed.

“ Having easy to understand weekly briefings for people under 18 would have been immensely helpful.”

- Lookout Contributor

“ The support given sounded condescending. The audience these campaigns were aimed at wasn’t right for our age group. Our school sent us quite a lot of stuff like mental health stuff but there was a point where no one wanted to read them and just ignored the emails. There was no progression in what they were saying. Definitely hearing from people our age is better.”

- Lookout Contributor

“ I know quite a few parents of young children who have been seriously affected, some even traumatised or “broken” by the experience of trying to juggle childcare with work expectations. I feel like they’re the ones who need support, mostly because it’s their broken relationships that affect the children most.”

- Lookout Contributor

In our experience of working with children, they often say that being an adult “looks like fun” because of the freedom it brings. So it was interesting when many young people told us they were glad to have been children during the pandemic rather than adults.

Adults often expressed immense anxiety and grief on behalf of young people, while being impressed with how resilient and flexible they were. We heard subtle disparities in what different age groups worried about: children were worried about exams where adults were worried about screen time; children were worried about their older relatives, where adults were worried that young people would internalise guilt; children were worried about the pressure on their parents, where adults worried about the day-to-day missing rituals of childhood.

When taken together, these intertwined perspectives tell a story of strong intergenerational concern and love.

Of course that wasn’t everyone’s experience. Some young people told us they didn’t have anyone to turn to.

As peripheral relationships fell away, some young people faced - and still face - a real relational emergency.

In addition to concerns about inequality of resources and opportunity, there must be a focus on rebuilding relationships with young people whose family can’t play that role.

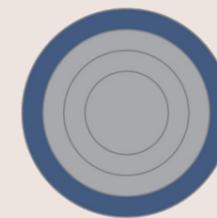


“ All they seem to do now is sit with digital devices. Face-to-face contact seems alien to them.”

- Lookout Contributor



CITIZENS RISING



Perhaps the most interesting shifts we heard about were at the edge of the relationship rings - society at large. The pandemic thrust young people into a live, shared, high-stakes negotiation of what it means to be a citizen.

They couldn't help but engage in a national public discourse. Many watched the briefings. Most followed the news. All saw their daily lives dramatically changed as part of a nation-wide call for solidarity.

We heard fascinating accounts of young people's rapidly evolving relationships with society at large. Our conversations suggest that these will be formative to how young people see the world.

“ I started watching the news a lot more.”

– Lookout Contributor

“ When we come out of the pandemic we'll be adults, we'll have gone through so much. It's really important to involve young people in discussions, to make sure that their experiences are being used.”

– Lookout Contributor

For all of us, the pandemic forced a wider reckoning about how we should change our behaviour in order to protect others - or how we relied on others. These themes loomed large in young people's comments.

As adults did - or didn't - step up to support each other, young people were watching and learning.

“ I got Covid back in October and my aunty and cousins were really good in cooking for us and shopping for us. It was a really hard time for us and it was really nice of them to help us.”

– Lookout Contributor

“ I was watching *The Good Doctor* and I saw how doctors had to isolate from their own families when they were helping patients. They were working really hard and when they came home they couldn't even see their own family. I really respected them.”

– Lookout Contributor

“ I saw that what you do will affect others, like if you sneeze it will affect others. I saw that some people were getting really impatient during lockdown but others were being really patient.”

– Lookout Contributor

Many young people faced tough experiences that we wouldn't normally expect of so many people at their age.

These experiences won't only affect young people's own lives, but can have a formative impact on how they believe societies should function.

Some young people told us that their own difficult experiences during the pandemic have shaped their view of their priorities.

“ It is really important to me, because I have struggled with my mental health, and I know what it's like to feel completely lost and have no one to turn to, so if I can create something that could help just one person I'd be happy.”

– Lookout Contributor

Some young people told us that lockdown created a space for them to see social issues in a new light, and get involved in a way they hadn't considered before.

“ I've always been interested in how to solve inequality but it was the first time I found a platform to get involved. I got involved in *Black Lives Matter*, I started campaigning. During lockdown I had time to educate myself about issues and events going on around the world.”

– Ankita Menon

This young person was explicit that the key factor was having more time: they had cared about these issues all along, but the enforced isolation made them delve more deeply into the social issues they could see playing out.

Young people also heard the public debate about inequality, and often saw it up close in their own lives.

“ Money has become really important. If people don't have the money they can't pay for tuition to fill in the things they have missed. Rich people can fill in the gaps but people who have less money can't.”

– Lookout Contributor

Some young people felt forced into a more adult interpretation of the world - they didn't have a choice to look away.

“ It's kind of sad that lots of people lost their childhood to covid - they were forced to become adults sooner.”

– Lookout Contributor

Pandemic experiences have shaped the civic sensibilities of a generation. Young people have made sacrifices for a wider good. They have seen gaping cracks in the society they are inheriting. And they have seen both selfishness and solidarity in how adults responded.

They have had tough times that changed their view of society's role, and many had the time and space to engage in social issues for the first time. They want adult society to shape up in terms of delivering on a meaningful recovery. And they want - and have found - a voice in how that world is shaped.

THE REASON WE COULDN'T



There are perspectives we didn't hear. That will always be the case in a project focused on individual experiences. But we noticed a particular contrast between the regenerating engagement of adults in sister-project The Observatory, and a muted response from many of the youth groups and schools invited to take part. In our combined decades-experience of working with schools and youth groups, this was something new, and something to notice.

Sometimes, friends and partners told us why they couldn't engage, and we found those "submissions" to be compelling clues of wider issues. What does this tell us about young people's relationships now?

SECTOR-WIDE INSITUTIONAL STRUGGLES

We heard about the institutions that support young people being under huge pressure. We heard of schools stuck in crisis mode, trying to cram months of content and experiences into packed days amidst confusing guidance. We heard of youth groups struggling to reach pre-pandemic levels of engagement with young people, presumably with previous relationships fading out in the face of lockdowns.

These organisations are part of a vital “middle tier” of young people’s relationships, and we see an urgent need to support them back into being a flourishing part of young people’s lives.

A MOMENT TOO LATE OR A MOMENT TOO SOON?

The Lookout started in July 2021, when many young people were looking forward to a summer of fun, friends and freedom. For some young people, the urgent need for reflection may have passed. Others may not have been ready: we have spoken elsewhere of the “deep tissue damage” that is still being uncovered and understood. We heard from some participants about Zoom fatigue. Young people will need to reflect on their experiences at different times - and potentially out of sync with the adults in their lives. The resources created as part of The Lookout will remain available and free to use. We encourage professionals and families to continue to make use of them in supporting young people to navigate the changing experiences and relationships that the pandemic has forced on them.

“ It is such a symptom of the madness that schools don’t have space to even consider taking up opportunities like this.”

– Lookout Contributor

“ We are struggling for volunteer and community engagement in a pretty big way across the board.”

– Lookout Contributor

“ I think (we need to be) sharing people’s stories and organising events, where we can almost celebrate the fact that we made it out, and to sort of highlight the fact that we all went through a lot.”

– Lookout Contributor

“ I liked the guided meditation because it helped remind me what it was like at the start of lockdown.”

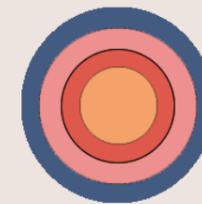
– Lookout Contributor

HOW TO DO BETTER

We have learnt from this project. Although careful thought was put into making the project engaging and accessible to young people, we could have done more. For example, we could have based the work around peer-led research (training up young people to lead this research with their peers) or used social media listening (analysing what is being said by young people on the social media platforms they’re already using). We also think it would be valuable to do this kind of work alongside arts professionals (theatre practitioners, musicians etc.) to give young people alternative ways of exploring and expressing their experiences. This would have cost more but too often we (as researchers and, more generally, as adults) create the spaces that work best for us, but not for participants and especially for young people. If we really want to hear more we need to be smarter about how we build relationships and enable the conversation.



WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE NEED



Young people were glad to know the “Chief Listeners” - and others - would be reading their thoughts. They told us that there were three things in particular that they need from adult society:

- a) The time and space to reconnect with important people in their lives
- b) A rounded package of support which goes beyond catching up on missed curriculum
- c) A more equal society which works better, for everyone

1

The time and space to reconnect with important people in their lives - both in their personal networks and in the “middle rings” of wider acquaintances.

Adult society needs to recognise the importance of this, and not interpret everything that has been lost in terms of narrow “catch-up” frames.

“ We were writing about what we were most grateful for and I wrote about my grandparents. It took me by surprise. I Facetime them every week so I didn’t let myself realise that I miss them. I didn’t realise how much of a difference there is between seeing someone in person and calling them. It’s small things like little rituals I do when I visit them - the food that’s available there, the house that they live in.” - Ankita Menon

2

A rounded package of support that goes beyond catching up on missed curriculum.

Young people want to do well in education and are frustrated when they are put under pressure without sufficient help or by unfair parameters. But they also need the wider experiences and sources of support that they have missed over lockdown.

“ Our local swimming pool has closed down and won’t come back. The council has been very difficult about it. The library has been closing down for a long time now. It shut down during lockdown and it’s not going to come back.”
- Lookout Contributor

“ I think for me and for my friends there should be things in place so that students aren’t as stressed. Maybe like extra help for students who are struggling so they don’t worry. Services for people who are struggling with their mental health online.”
- Lookout Contributor

3

A more equal society which works better, for everyone.

Young people had their own experiences of the inequalities that were reinforced by the pandemic, and they expect change.

“ If I’d been asked this question at the start of the pandemic (i.e. what young people need now) I’d have said ‘return to normal as fast as possible’ but I see that’s a naive thing now. Now I’d say use the pandemic to improve how things were before the pandemic. It’s easier to rebuild after something has been destroyed.”
- Ankita Menon



RESPONSES FROM THE CHIEF LISTENERS



DANNY KRUGER, MP:

The covid crisis demanded an emergency response, relying on the resilience of large swathes of the nation, including children and young people.

I commend the work of The Relationships Project for 'The Lookout' report which stepped into the experience of a generation shaped by the pandemic.

The findings will make an important contribution to our national recovery. Our young people felt they had to grow up quickly, grappling with uncertainty, isolation and illness while their support networks became stretched.

While marginalised during the pandemic, the needs of young people must be front and centre of the recovery. Their skills and resilience are crucial assets as we rebuild our society together.



LINDA WOOLSTON

The contributions of the young people (and adults) in the Lookout, moved me, inspired me, and gave me a feeling of hope. Also, at the same time, deep sadness. Sadness around the challenges that young people have had to face, and are facing, as a result of the pandemic particularly the themes expressed of fear, loss and isolation. Hope comes from the evident resilience, an appreciation of the value of connections and for some, seeing social issues in a new light and realising that they can make a difference in change for the better. As we move forward, if we want to look back on the covid years as a time we changed for good, then tapping into the wisdom of young people is so important; as is find ways to continue listening and ensuring they are able to express their unique feelings, thoughts and ideas – and be heard.



METE COBAN, MP

I want to say a huge thank you to all the young people who shared such powerful insights. I was particularly struck by how many of you were getting interested and involved in making change in society. This is so great to see, and we definitely need to support you to be leaders in your communities, in tackling social problems, and in politics. Please keep up the great work on communicating what young people need, and being leaders yourselves in making change.



IESHA SMALL

Dear young people,

It was a pleasure to read your views and experiences of the covid 19 pandemic. I think two things jumped out for me:

- A year is a large proportion of the time you have been alive, anything from 4%-20% for people aged 25-5 years old. To have spent such a large proportion of your life so far in difficult circumstances because of a pandemic is very unsettling.
- Adults have spent lots of time talking about academic catchup for young people in education but it seems that what many of you would really value is support in 'catching up' and re-adjusting socially, emotionally and mentally.

I shall have the two things in my mind during my work to prevent young people becoming involved in violence and ensuring that safe outdoor spaces are accessible to, and useful for, as many different types of people as possible. Thank you for your openness and honesty.



KIRSTY MCNEIL

Children and young people have done extraordinary things for us adults over the last few years. The sacrifices they have made – and the worries they have shouldered – must never be forgotten and we all have a lot of work to do to show them the same love and interest that they have gifted to their families and communities. I have learnt so much listening to their stories and advice and promise everyone at Save the Children will work hard to build a world that’s worthy of what children have done.



RAY SHOSTAK

Nelson Mandela once said ‘There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.’ Listening to those that took part in The Lookout suggests we all - family, local services and government - need to think carefully about the lived experiences of our children and young people during the pandemic. They clearly tell us some of what they have gained and some of the experiences they have lost from the restrictions to their day to day relationships. Policymakers, particularly, need to ensure we don’t let schooling get in the way of education; and that the local services for children, families and young people are themselves helped to recover quickly.



MADDIE DINWOODIE

To all the young people who contributed to this valuable report – thank you. We have heard what you need to recover and rebuild from your experiences of the pandemic and are working hard to respond. Relationships are central to the work we do at UK Youth and we understand their value and impact. A relationship with a youth worker is a key part of the ‘middle rings’ of the relationship circle, and accessing youth work provides the opportunity to build new relationships with peers. The relationship with a youth worker is unique as it is voluntary, long-term and is built on trust – making it such an important relationship for young people. The youth sector has suffered through the pandemic and vital services for young people were lost in communities, along with connections to youth workers. We are rebuilding the youth sector to ensure that young people can reconnect, or connect for the first time with youth workers to access the support, experiences and opportunities that they need to thrive. We want to create a social that understands, champions and delivers effective youth work to all.



TULIP SIDDIQ, MP

I’m so grateful to the young people who contributed to The Lookout for being so honest and thoughtful. I can see that many of you have had tough experiences, but also stepped up to help your families and communities. We absolutely must make sure that you get the support you need for education, for community activities, for mental health, and for rebuilding relationships with all the wide mix of people you need in your lives. We must also make sure that we use your energy and ideas for building a better world. Thanks for using your voices to help make that happen.



OUR CONCLUSION

This generation of young people has been shaped by a crisis which adult society is still untangling - and they have spent a much greater proportion of their lives living through it than adults have.

Many more young people than usual have grappled with formative experiences of uncertainty, isolation and death.

They have had to develop new skills and sources of resilience, and they have thought about what makes a society hang together through tough times. They have seen people step up to help each other - and they have stepped up themselves.

Those experiences have been shaped by the relationships that they did - or didn't - have to support them. They have urgent needs, and a burgeoning sense of citizenship. The young people we spoke to didn't feel bitter or angry about what they had been asked to sacrifice - they had been protecting the people they love. But they did often feel like their needs had been considered as an afterthought. Many young people do have relationships where they are listened to and

supported - but that needs to translate into action on the things that they care about: rounded educational and mental health support, fair systems for deciding their futures, and action on social problems. And for those who don't have the relationships they need to recover, we must consider this a pressing emergency.

In the middle of a crisis, it's tough to set up the structures to listen to what young people need - yet that's when their insights are never more needed. We need to be listening to them all the time, and now is the time to become a nation that does that.

Young people were thrown into a dramatic global effort to protect the most vulnerable - they were participating, learning and changing. Their sense of having a stake in society cannot be put back into the box.

LINKS TO RESOURCES

The resources created as part of The Lookout will remain freely available to use. The guided meditation helping young people to reflect on different elements of their experiences can be found [here](#).

A session plan with suggested activities (also including the text from the guided meditation) can be found [here](#).

We always encourage teachers and play leaders to screen and adapt the resources for the young people and the context that you are working in.

Get In Touch

We'd love to hear how the pandemic has been for you and your thoughts on how we can ensure that 'recovery' takes into account the hopes and needs of young people. Follow us on Twitter @Rships_Project or send us an email at hello@relationshipsproject.org



relationshipsproject.org