

Suburb News Youth

LOCKDOWN REFLECTIONS

After a year of COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns, the Suburb News Youth team share their personal reflections and coping methods.

Back in March, time came to a jerky halt, I had been so busy and in the blink of an eye everything had gone. I had all this time and nothing to fill it with. I didn't know how much longer I could "just relax", like everyone told me, I needed to feel useful. It felt like we were on a timeline that was very slow, weeks blended together and I could go days without doing something worth remembering.



So, I planted sunflowers. It gave me something to do and a focus for all my energy. Every morning I would check if they had budded or blossomed and that made every day seem important because, even if I hadn't done anything important, the sunflowers had still grown. I really think that all of that care and attention is what made them grow over 2 metres tall!

I also got to watch a family of swans grow up, I would visit them every week on my walks and they would be bigger. Feeding them and watching them flourish, gave me a purpose and something to look forward to. I went back a few weeks ago and they were all grown up, it felt like the end of an era in a strange way. I feel like I haven't done much in the last 9 months but these cygnets have hatched and grown into beautiful swans and I have had the privilege of watching them on that journey.

Over the last year I have come to appreciate that not everything has to be so fast paced. Slowing down has not only given me the time to value this, but has also made me more grateful for the time that I have to spend doing the things that I love.



MADHU

The first lockdown came at a very frustrating time for me.

Others reported feeling lucky to have a chance to slow down and ground themselves after a few hectic months, but I felt the opposite: my life which was on the cusp of long-awaited changes, was now indefinitely on pause. Instead of sitting my GCSEs and having the wild summer of festivals and holidays I had been planning for months, I got endless days in my bedroom to rot. Every day that I'd ever spent at home revising became my biggest regret, and I felt a constant, low-level rage all the time.

I filled my time well enough. My daily walks were the highlight of my days, and I found joy in discovering local spots I'd never seen before. Sometimes I would go out with a book and not come back for several hours, and in the spring sunshine, this was not a bad way to spend an afternoon. I took up sewing, focused on my painting, redecorated my bedroom, and did the Zoom parties – a quintessential lockdown experience. Despite this, I felt at the time, and still feel looking back, that lockdown was nothing more than a waste of my 16th year.

Since then, I've started sixth form at a new school, where I've met hundreds of new people and had some of those teen moments I craved throughout lockdown. I'm still coasting off of that excitement. The biggest lesson I have had to learn is that not every moment of my life has to be transformative: I think that's an easy trap to fall into as a teenager. I've had to learn to sit with the discomfort that idleness brings, and try to overcome the anger I feel over being robbed of my chance to be 16.



ROSA



Lockdown should probably be the buzzword of the year, next to "stay safe", "unprecedented" and "front line". But to brighten up a gloomy year, here are some positive reflections from the lockdowns.

I'm sure all commuters will relate to the extra time gained in the morning – whether you spend it catching up on an extra 30 minutes of rest or starting your morning with a meditation session, it's nice to have a break from the (sometimes hectic!) morning routine.

I've learned to appreciate school: the truth is, every year my six-week summer flew by and I never seemed to have enough time to do everything. The closer it got to September, the better an extra week or even two of holiday sounded, but this year, by the time August was nearly over, I realised that if the summer holidays actually went on for longer, I'd just be... bored. I recognised that school stimulates us, and yet we take it for granted.

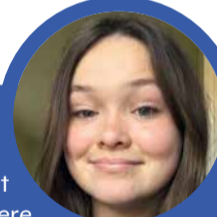
But of course, not having to work around a rigid school timetable also makes it so much easier to appreciate the things that were always there, but you just couldn't see until the background noise was gone. In a literal sense, seeing the stars in London is usually difficult what with light pollution, but during lockdown I saw the North Star and Cassiopeia; and Uranus and Mars – all very bright and very beautiful. And even compared to that, my favourite time of the sky was a golden sunrise – so next time you go out, don't forget to look up at the sky.



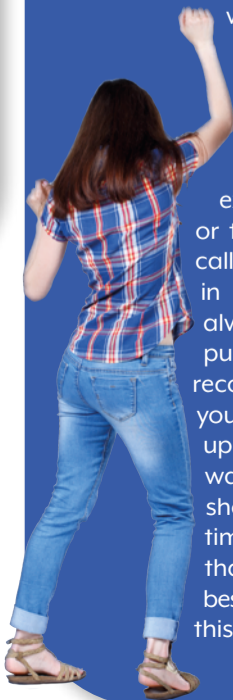
ISABELLE

When the third lockdown was announced, the main thought running through my head was "here we go again". I had been enjoying some relative normality in attending school in person, and was feeling a lot better for having seen my friends face to face each day. Now that school is back online again, I find myself struggling with my mental health once more. Being stuck inside all the time is difficult for all of us, especially kids and teenagers, who are social creatures that need interaction to grow. As I am sure you have noticed, lessons online are more challenging as it is much harder to focus, and the workload seems to have increased exponentially.

For me, what helps are three things. The first is getting outside. I would recommend going for a short stroll in a local park, or even just around your block, as the cold winter air will do wonders to clear your mind. My second suggestion is keeping up with your friends. It can be so easy to feel isolated in times like these, which is why I recommend reaching out, whether it be in person, for a socially-distanced exercise outside, as is permitted by law, or through social media or with a phone call. You could even write a letter and stick it in the post. My friends and family are always excellent at cheering me up and putting a smile on my face. My third recommendation is to do something fun for yourself. Whether it is putting on some upbeat music and having a dance, or watching an episode of your favourite show, it is incredibly important to have time to relax and treat yourself. Remember that it is absolutely okay to not be feeling your best right now, and that just getting through this time is an amazing achievement.



JOANNA



Like everyone else, my plans changed significantly on that fateful day in March when it was announced schools were to be shut and I wouldn't have to do my GCSEs anymore. Suddenly, the months I had spent revising and stressing over my exams didn't have as much significance and I found myself having a lot more free time than I had ever expected in my wildest dreams.

Initially, I took the time to just rest. Knowing that there would never be a time where I had so much freedom to do as I pleased, I took the opportunity to sleep as much as I wanted to, catching up on the hours I had missed while staying up late at night to revise for my exams. For once in my life, I could finally lie in instead of being forced to wake up because of school.

Whilst I tried to stay productive and tried to take up some new hobbies, I'll admit that I took the time to watch a lot of different TV shows and movies as well as basketball, staying up every night to watch my favourite team play. I think I binged on around a dozen shows and found myself watching anything and everything out of sheer boredom.

However, I also took this time for self-care and did try to become active, though not without some struggle! I found myself taking daily walks for a change of scenery, something I never used to do and got into a Yoga routine with my mother, which was not only great for its health benefits but also because I got to spend time with her, something that was hard with the hectic schedules we both had before.

Overall, lockdown gave me a chance to rest and do things I wouldn't have been able to do before. I've learnt to cherish the good times after losing out on my summer and also learnt the importance of family, after being blessed with time to spend with them.



KAYA

For many, the absence of routine was the most terrifying part of lockdown. I found the exact opposite. By changing how I viewed this gaping empty space of time, I was able to really enjoy my second lockdown. Instead of regarding this blank canvas as overwhelming, I approached it as liberating. And I encourage all you readers to do the same!

My advice is to establish a regular and early sleeping schedule 11pm to 8am for instance. While I spent my first lockdown being the only soul awake at night – apart from twittering birds – with the second lockdown I discovered that the key is to prioritise the morning.

Not only does waking up early make you view the world through fresh eyes, but it also provides you with time to make a hearty breakfast every day whether that be eggs on toast or pancakes. I discovered that the magic to living a successful lockdown is an early, satisfying breakfast. Maybe you can make a cup of tea too?

But lockdown is also the opportunity for... you guessed it... reading! My personal patience for reading diminishes throughout the day. Because of this, I advise that (after your lavish breakfast, of course) you force yourself to read for 1-3 hours. After reading, a workout or a midday run are great energisers before lunch.

If you keep to this healthy morning routine, I can guarantee that this blank canvas of time will transform itself into a beautifully colourful painting!

ALLIE



CALL OUT TO YOUNG TECHIES

HGS Heritage - The Suburb's Online Virtual Museum is building its new Fun Size/Youth Zone Collection. We're looking to put together a small team of programme developers to help in this project. Want to be involved?

Contact judy@hgsheritage.org.uk **YOUTH ZONE**