

"I'm really worried about the division"

Structural inequalities highlighted by the pandemic

Inequalities existed before the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to exist after it (although we hope to do something about that). However, what the pandemic has done is throw these inequalities into sharp relief for all to see, whether that's racism, ableism, stigmas around homelessness or any other kind of inequality you can think of. This insight briefing explores people's stories, experiences and emotions on these inequalities over the last year.

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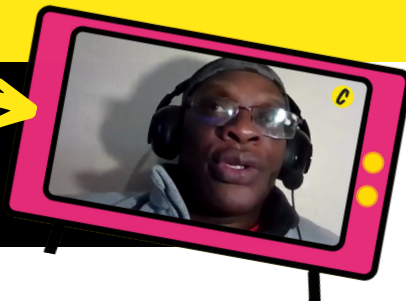
Division, inequalities and COVID-19

Our conversations with folk have shown us just how devastating these inequalities can be. For instance, imagine not only having to worry about a family member with underlying health issues catching and being hospitalised with COVID-19, but also having to worry that they'll arbitrarily be slapped with a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order against their own wishes and those of their family. That's the reality being faced by people living with learning disabilities (and older people), something which Vicky discusses: "All this talk about DNR orders ... isn't giving me much hope either." Talking about family members with learning disabilities and underlying health issues she asks: "Are they in danger of getting a DNR on them and basically being left to die?" It demonstrates the starkly different way in which some lives are valued as lesser in the UK. This sense of ableism also comes up in Yvonne's story, where she talks about going into the first lockdown with no time to prepare her autistic son for the changes. "And any parent of a child with additional needs will know that understanding what's coming, prepping for it, and preparing your child for a change is really, really important so they feel better equipped themselves to deal with the situation. ... My child's particular difficulty is autism and anxiety. ... So, there's always a lot of preparation happens in our house if something big is going to happen and we didn't get that chance. ... And I suspect that's been replicated across the whole of the country for families in similar positions." While lockdown was tough for many parents, the idea that we're all in it together was peddled without any thought for families of children with additional needs who were losing a lot more than just school.



Click on the TV to listen to some of this topic's stories

Click on the TV to listen to some more of this topic's stories



Other groups given little thought by the system were the homeless. Tony talks about working with an organisation who helped get socially distanced accommodation for homeless people during lockdown: "One size does not fit all. There was people who had pets, for example dogs, and they were told they couldn't get accommodation because the dog couldn't go into the hotel room. I completely understand that, but we need to be thinking about how can we move all the barriers, not just some barriers for some people." He also talks about how the accommodation provided was more akin to a prison, with people kept in their rooms, provided with meals and that was it: "It was meeting a physical need but not a holistic need." Again, this sort of treatment would not be afforded to all groups in society.

But we're a society already deeply divided. Carole notes that in Bolton, different cultural approaches to the lockdown emphasising difference and exacerbating tensions between communities, while Angela says, "The way that the current political system uses propaganda to divide us, I think is divisive for my town [Wigan]. I'm really worried about the growth in fascism that I'm seeing in my town, really worried about that. ... I think we've got to meet it with love because it feels very much like we're attacking people's viewpoints, and some of those viewpoints are worthy of being attacked, but the way that we're attacking them is causing us to move further apart. And so, I think the work, the longer game is how we can get people connected with what we've got in common." Division, then, doesn't have to be permanent, but folk need to work together and not fight each other in order to defeat it.

Interestingly, it's not all negative. Jen, an autistic woman, says, "As autistic people ... there are so many things that society and culture expects of us in terms of contact and going into very busy, intense spaces, in terms of social interaction and sensory input, dealing with multiple different demands. Actually, this lockdown has given us the opportunity to have all of those things taken away and to experience the world in a way that has shown us that good mental health, a positive sense of wellbeing, is perfectly possible as autistic people, under the right circumstances." So, as well as highlighting inequalities, lockdown has demonstrated that some inequalities may be easier to overcome than we have previously believed.



Click on the TV to listen to all of the stories from the movement gathered so far

"One size does not fit all... we need to be thinking about how can we move all the barriers, not just some barriers for some people."

What we've learned from the stories

Our conversations with our Camerados have shown us a lot about inequalities:

- The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities in society. However, it has also shown that some inequalities could be easier to overcome than the system would have us believe.
- We should create more opportunities for stories and voices to be heard in forums like the A #BitOfCompany Chat broadcasts.
- Trust takes time to build and space must be made for it to do so – when trust is there, real conversations can take place that can lead to change.

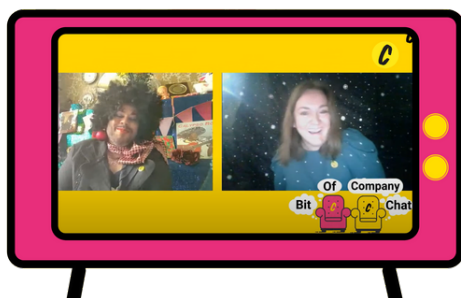
A #BitOfAction

Here's what we can do to start breaking down structural inequalities right now:

1. Chat with folk on the street – take genuine interest in people, find out more about them and mix with people who don't look like you.
2. Call out injustice when you see it and also talk to others about these issues and be opening to learning from others with different perspectives than yours.
3. Share A #BitOfCompany Chat episodes 9 and 10 broadcasts and get more people talking about these issues.

You can watch A #BitOfCompany Chat episodes that explore these topics more on YouTube

Click on the TVs below to view the shows!



EPISODE 9



EPISODE 10

About The Project

Camerados is a growing global movement of people who get through tough times by looking out for each other. The movement's Public Living Rooms are a space for people to chat and be alongside one another and, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, they've created virtual Public Living Room spaces known as the #SpoonRoom that keep these connections and conversations going.

People's Voice Media meanwhile, is committed to supporting folk to bring about positive social change through the Community Reporter movement. Community Reporting is a form of digital storytelling that focuses on the gathering and sharing of lived experiences, and using these stories to start conversations of change between different people, groups and organisations.

Thanks to the Emerging Futures Fund from the National Lottery Community Fund, the Association of Camerados and People's Voice Media have come together to look at people's experiences of the pandemic, and create spaces in which different voices could be heard. Over 65 stories have been gathered and we've produced five insight briefings summarising what we've learned from listening to folk. We also created an online chat show – #BitOfCompanyChat – where we've talked about some of the themes in the stories a bit more and thought of bits of action we can take to overcome them together.

Find out more at <https://www.camerados.org> and <https://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk>

The logo for Camerados, featuring the word "CAMERADOS" in a bold, black, hand-drawn style font on a yellow background.